# SHORT STORIES OUT OF SOVIET RUSSIA

*Ruth Brooke*

HER BOOK

# SHORT STORIES OUT OF SOVIET RUSSIA

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# SHORT STORIES OUT OF SOVIET RUSSIA

COMPILED AND TRANSLATED BY JOHN COURNOS

NEW YORK
E P DUTTON & CO INC

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First Edition

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# FOREWORD

If art and, above all, the art of literature, is a reflection of life, then there is nothing astonishing in the fact that Russian fiction of the past decade should be so obsessed with cruelty, violence and horror. Pity there still is—one cannot imagine Russian literature without pity—and never was there greater need for it, for not only do cruelty, violence and horror evoke it as lights evoke shadows, but pity is necessary for the creating of that balance without which neither life nor art can exist. Insofar as these conflicting qualities are co-ordinated, joined together in right measure for the sake of an equilibrium important to maintain, insofar has the artist succeeded in creating a work of art distinguished for tragic dignity. It cannot be said that the art of fiction in Soviet Russia has, as a whole, achieved this tragic dignity, which is a matter of individual genius rather than of political doctrine. There are no Tolstoys or Dostoevskys in Russia today, but there are, nevertheless, several writers of considerable stature deserving of admiration. The materials created by war and revolution have, indeed, proven too overwhelming, and perhaps the artists are too close to the events they describe to see them in perspective; hence, it is not surprising that most of them are recorders rather than inventive artists. But recorders can be artists, if not artists of the very first order. Most of the good Russian story-tellers today are recorders, but

superb of their kind, and quite apart from their artistic significance, by no means negligible, they have a value for the faithful picture they present of Russian life as it is lived today; far more faithful, one should add, than the picture presented by the political or sociological observer.

Of the prose writers produced by the past decade, the most distinguished is, undoubtedly, Isaac Babel, of whom one of the sanest of Soviet Russia critics has said that he is the first Jewish writer to enter Russian literature as a Russian writer. As Russian literature already numbers in its ranks several Jewish writers of no mean reputation, this statement gains a peculiar significance. The critic's implication is that the author has made a specifically Russian contribution to literature. This is more than justified. There is a quality in Babel's prose, rich as it is in powerful rhythms and sensuous music, integral to the content, that raises his art at once above that of the mere recorder and makes of him an artist little short of the greatest. His whole imagination has gone into form, and though he remains throughout a realist yet the final product distilled from the raw materials of life into an ultimate essence deserves the name of "pure poetry." The series of outwardly disconnected episodes of Budeny's Cossacks which he describes in *Konarmia* ("Horse Army") have an inner unity; and an epic virtue which has not seen its equal since Gogol's "Taras Bulba." The wonder is the greater because Babel accomplishes this without employing the customary ingredients of epics; his language is not only simple, but he often obtains his "effects" out of the vernacular; and he does not disdain irony, which, strange to say, far from taking from the epic quality of his work, actually heightens it.

In his orchestration of the vernacular he has been compared to John Synge, and the comparison is by no means far-fetched. Nevertheless, there remains his limitation as a recorder, and even his admirers are exercised as to what there remains for him to accomplish after he has exhausted the rich vein of war and revolution, which in his case were an intimate experience and not merely a background on which to hang "plots" of his own conniving. His output so far has been very small. Russian critics take great pride in Babel; they appear to catch in his music that heroic *tempo* which they think is in keeping with revolutionary events. They stress the need of a myth as a guiding force in creative literature. And they seem to have found their myth in the demigod-like figure of Lenin. In the heroic spirit of their leader the writers of Soviet Russia are asked to mould their characters and to create the Odyssey of modern life. It is, in a large measure, due to this mood of courage and victory, that Gladkov's novel, "Cement," a work of moderate merit, has had such a popular success in Russia. But it is tainted with propaganda and false optimism; this cannot be said of Babel's productions which are truly Homeric. He is far too much of an artist ever to be obvious.

If Babel is put aside—for he would be unique in any country or age—how many Russian tale tellers today manage to respond to the demands made upon them by their mentors? Hardly any. Tradition holds strong there. "New times—new songs!" exclaims a critic. But the truth is, the new Russian tunes are the old tunes, only the words are different. The hero may be a Bolshevik, but human nature remains the same. And so the Bolshevik critic is annoyed because the brilliant young novelist Pilniak sees "the beast in man" and fills his

pages with "men-wolves," which is somewhat reminiscent of the intellectual Andreev. Again, he looks askance at Leonid Leonov, a very fine artist who, unfortunately, has a fondness for humble heroes and provincial types, and casts lingering looks behind. This smacks too much of Russian "classics," of Chekhov. But he is pleased with the Siberian proletarian, Vsevolod Ivanov, whose wandering career as a fakir, clown, wrestler, jack-of-all-trades and Red partisan, has been ardent enough to suit the most zealous communist. Yet, as one who has out-Gorkied Gorky, he has, after all, but taken over the mantle of the author "Foma Gordeev" and "Twenty-six Men and One Girl." There is a host of other young men writing creditable fiction: Fedin (a considerable figure), Glieb Alekseev, Lidin, Budantzev, Kataev, to say nothing of Artem Vesioly and Sergey Malashkin, both men of importance. There is this to be said for the art of fiction in Soviet Russia: it is virile, much more virile than that of the *émigré* writers. A Russian writer away from his own soil seems to lose some of the sap that gives life to his work.

Of the pre-revolutionary writers who continue working in their own country under the Bolshevik régime the most important are: S. Sergeev-Tzensky, a fine, vigorous writer of obscure personality, who in "Transfiguration" has written one of the best novels of our time; V. Veresaev, whose "In a Blind Alley" states clearly the dilemma of the modern revolutionary apprehensive of Bolshevism; and Aleksey Tolstoy who is a good teller of tales when he does not allow ideas to intrude on his art. And, of course, there is Andrey Bely, whose recent three-volume novel was a considerable event, though Bely has never surpassed or even

equalled that prodigious earlier work of his called "Peterburg," which is one of the great books of our epoch. Nor can Mikhail Prishvin be overlooked. He is not concerned with wars or revolutions, but he can tell an animal story as well as anyone in Russia, and his style is simple and a pleasure to read.

Finally, there is Efim Zozulya, Russia's one satirist, who, when he does not write provincial tales *à la* Chekhov, writes somewhat after the manner of Anatole France in "Penguin Island." Accepted by the Bolshevik critics, his work is equivocal; it is as easy to read into him doctrines anti-Bolshevik as Bolshevik. It all depends upon the point of view of him who reads the stories. "A Tale About Ak and Humanity" is a case in point. Is Ak, who would destroy superfluous humanity, Lenin himself? Zozulya knows, and he won't tell.

JOHN COURNOS.

LEONID LEONOV

Leonid Leonov, who was born in Moscow in 1899, has, as an artist, his roots in the past. Many influences are claimed for him: now his name is associated with Dostoevsky, now with Gogol, now with Chekhov or Remizov. He is interested in the humbler types, "petty people" as they are called in Russia, but he never writes in a commonplace way about them but exalts them to the dignity of symbols. The story here translated is a case in point. He has drawn some masterly portraits of provincial types. The Bolsheviks look askance at him because he has drawn so largely on the methods of the Russian realism of the past. They appear to think that he is wasting his sympathy on relics of a bygone age, but even they respect the fineness of his art though they regret its "classic" tendencies.

Leonov is of peasant descent. He began his literary career by writing poetry. He did not begin to write prose until 1922, and has already written a number of things which are among the most original in the Russian language.

# IVAN'S MISADVENTURE

## *By* Leonid Leonov

She laughed at his wretched gift and, crumpling it into a ball, flung it on the snow at Ivan's feet. Then, her arms akimbo, she laughed at his love's sorrow, but Ivan did not hear. . . . While still an orphan lad, working on the soil, Ivan had caught a fever and suffered for a long time, until he was urged to visit the mistress of the estate. The proprietress lived alone and gave medical attendance to the peasants from sheer boredom. She gave Ivan quinine, great quantities of it, and said: "You'll be deaf, but you'll be well!" And, to be sure, Ivan was cured of the ague, and in his joy did not notice his sudden deafness. It did not hinder him from bearing his peasant yoke, it saved him from village quarrels, it saved him from the war, and although his deafness stupefied him he got used to it and even grew fond of inviolate silence.

The world became in his eyes soundless and wistful; clouds and birds floated in it, the grass grew in it, and the snow fell. . . . Ivan did not notice human beings in this world, but much dropped to his share from them. Among other things he was regarded as a carpenter, but he lived for the most part half hungry. He did not offend his world, his birds, his grass; but it pleased the priest not to pay him for digging graves, while the lads made diversion for themselves by throwing Ivan's simple tools into the pond. His life abounded in such misadventures. It was precisely with this word that

he expressed his guileless astonishment at the order of the world. And though it seemed as if nothing could darken the lowly joy of his existence, his failure to win Lenka Bragina's heart deeply wounded him.

Humbly he picked up the head kerchief crumpled up by Lenka, smoothed it out and put it to his bosom. The village urchins danced in the snow round the simple fellow and taunted him, but Ivan did not hear them. The sole creature capable of dissipating his confusion before his lot was his aunt; and it was toward her he was now wending his way. His aunt lived in a rich village twenty versts away. She was living out her time as a nurse at the priest's house. She was good, and she was called Maria. He often came to her with his griefs, and, after three days as her guest, he would return to his own village more happily reconciled to his fate. The sorrows of the world did not perturb him.

In that same stern year the War had broken out. The world was in agony, and in its convulsions it gnawed the ground poisoned by its own blood. Maddened by the thirst to see their own home and family and to build a new life, the soldiers abandoned the front and became scattered wanderers in the land. In hostile bands they passed by the village, because the village in which Ivan Esakov lived stood on one of the main highways. The road ran on a high embankment and against the blazing evening sunset were to be seen the dragging, drooping figures, dark with anger and weighed down with weapons, which they bore with them for every untoward occasion. These appearances awakened forebodings of misfortune in the hearts of the peasants to whom the soldiers came for bread, but they did not frighten Ivan, locked as in a fastness in his impenetrable silence.

Ivan was oblivious of the things which happened round him. A soft, gentle snow was falling, the road was comfortable, covered as with down; it was pleasant to wander upon it in the obscure darkness toward the remote welcoming flame in his aunt's window and to think about Lenka. Proud and handsome creature that she was, it was not for her to marry a white-browed journeyman, and when Ivan understood this he at once decided to present the head kerchief to Aunt Maria in gratitude for her solicitude, so that she might wear it during holy days and remember the orphan.

It was darkening when, having passed the wood, he began to climb upward toward the village. It stood on the hill, the belfry stuck into the heavens, and under it the evening birds careered. He took the usual path toward the priest's house and knocked. The door was opened to him not by his aunt, but by the priest's daughter, and all at once Ivan's heart beat violently at the ostensible incongruity. Guiltily smiling and clutching at the hat in his hands, he gazed at the girl, who crossly stamped her foot clad in a felt boot and bade him go.

In answer to her cry, the sleepy priest came out. He was dressed in striped wadded trousers, and he was unkempt and angry.

"The old woman has died," he said, digging his fingers deep into his abundant hair. "She's died and's lying under a stone."

Then Ivan began to bow low and humbly to thank the priest, and he did this for a long time, and when he came to his senses he was sitting on a bench in the porch and before him stood his aunt's meagre suitcase, while his hat lay before the closed door. He put his hat on his thinnish hair, and drew the kerchief from

his bosom. He no longer had anyone to whom he might offer it, and, dumbfounded, he gazed at it. The kerchief was a cheap one, with a narrow flowery border, but it was red and pretty, he thought. In the half-darkness it flamed, and it burned Ivan's hands. He quickly thrust it into its former place, in his bosom, and descended the steps. The dim shafts of light from the priest's windows pierced the half darkness, and in these shafts of light he could see the snow falling.

"A misadventure," he said, smiling in a lost way at himself; for there was no place for him in the big village, and the wolves hindered his returning to Lenka. So he decided to look for a night's lodging at the pot-house, which was kept by a widow. The woman made a decoction from apples, and the drink was famed throughout the district. With tucked-up sleeves and buxom bosom and looking very much the Amazon, she took Ivan's money in a business-like way and brought him out a bottle.

"It's turned out thick enough to dilute," said the widow, and pricked up her ears at a whining sound audible in the nocturnal silence. "Again Efim is beating his wife. He loves to do it across the face. Tell me, what passions exist on earth!" Suddenly recognising in her customer a deaf man, she took it into her head to use him for diverting her from her widowed boredom.

Putting her cloudy face close to Ivan's, she slapped him in man-like fashion on his back, and bursting into guffaws, pushed him into the hut. A red jacket she had been sewing was lying on the table near the lamp, and because of it the vapours rising from the vat in which the spiced drink was cooking appeared red. With his habitual confused smile Ivan went into the hut,

and sitting down by the stove, he watched the widow prepare a repast on the table, consisting of soaked apples, nuts and bottle already bought by Ivan. Then, with hands folded across her stomach, she gravely seated herself on a bench, and bade Ivan to make himself at home. Making an effort not to look at the unsightly hole in the widow's strong teeth, a souvenir left by her bullying first husband, Ivan took the glass from the table and for a moment watched his own reflection in the liquid, dark as fate itself, then, with a frown, he drank the contents of the glass at one gulp and stretched his hand out for a second glass, but for some reason hesitated and sat down on the bench.

Sadly, yet with the dignity of assurance, the widow observed his incoherent movements.

"Why do you sit there lamenting-like, and don't liven up a bit?" she asked, gnawing at a tough apple skin. "Why be angry at anybody . . . you look as though you hadn't anything or anybody in life. Every crow crawls into its hole at night, but you are alone, without a nest, an orphan!" With a bitter tear of sympathy the widow was preparing the way for love's solace. "And your eye is uneasy, sickly. . . . How can a man look at a woman with an eye like that? A woman is a hornless beast, a cunning creature . . . a woman wants good cheer. Another one in my place would have shown you the door long ago! Only I'm sorry for you."

Ivan was silent, without ceasing watching the yellow leaf of flame in the lamp, and he was thinking that it was well to have matches against wolves. The widow had already edged her way to his side and was petting him and making love to him, inciting him to passion, but he paid no attention to her contacts. Not being used to drink, he became intoxicated at once, and though

he thought of his aunt's suit-case, he had no will to rise. It was then that she extinguished the flame of the lamp. Ivan turned in confusion, but in the widow's place there was darkness, satiated with the same red, odorous vapours. The dead silence rose, rang and darted away, quickly he hit out and struck something stony, but the red vapours merely laughed, mocking his resistance. . . . He fell asleep only towards dawn and in a dream he saw the quiet road of the wood; the tree branches bepowdered with snow inclined over the road, and all this was enveloped in a confused, restless longing for Lenka.

With the object of avoiding gossip and entertaining no hopes of further amorous actions on the part of Ivan, the widow quickly awakened him and jostled him, unfed, across the yard into the street. On her sated face it was impossible to note any traces of the night just passed, though it left Ivan weary. Tired of her solitude, she had not sated her longing with Ivan, and the respectable moujiks had not yet returned from the war. Burning with shame for this the first misadventure of its kind in his life, Ivan made no effort to remain any longer with the woman.

For a minute, while the bolt made a malignant noise behind the gates, he stood irresolutely; then he trembled and ran away across the chaste snow. His body was in pain, until once more he entered the wood which he had just seen in his dream. Here everything was stilled, the pain as well as the shame, because his own inner silence fell in with the silence of the world. Every step he took here across space was pleasantly familiar. He secretly knew his favourite tree by name, he remembered by face every juniper bush. He had been here hundreds of times, but now he was glad at the

dumb solemnity of the morning, in which, as it were, his own underided truth had taken shelter. His breast became filled with cheer and blitheness, while his body became light, and the bearing of it to meet its fate was no onerous task. Suddenly Ivan wanted to shout, and he refrained only because in the distance he espied some sledges in the road.

"Ah, you'd better hurry, lad . . . there, at the Krutilins, someone got away with a horse last night!" shouted an old man quickly from his sledge, but recognising the deaf man he merely waved his hand and smacked his lips to hurry his mare. The perturbation in his words did not touch Ivan, and at the end of his journey his sorrows of yesterday were wholly lifted, he felt only hunger, and when the plain in all its snowy magnificence opened before him, he was again ready for his astounding misadventures. It was near midday, and Ivan was already coming face to face with unfamiliar persons attired in military tatters.

Ascending a mound which overlooked the village, Ivan sadly paused on its height. Below him, near the storehouses, where, from time immemorial, crowds gathered, there was a huge throng. Angry fists rose above human heads, and many men's feet attired in felt boots were urged across the snow by rage; the dense vapours of breathing floated above the throng. Intermittently, with the moujiks, strange soldiers stamped their feet; there was about a dozen of them, and they joined in discussing the occurrence of the night. Two good-natured bearded moujiks held the blacksmith Zotov under the arms, while the others formed a tight ring to prevent an escape. The blacksmith, who was a notorious horse-thief in the district, smiled sullenly at the stern judges; he hardened himself and he spat;

he had apparently reconciled himself to his fate. At the same time a tall lean moujik, Foma Krutilin himself, was holding forth before the villagers . . . not so much before them as before the strange soldiers . . . and not so much before the soldiers as before the dark power of their guns, at which he looked askew with an enraged eye.

"I ask you, fellow moujiks, what does it mean?" asked Foma, turning to the provisional court of justice. "And what's one to do? Bring the horse for the night into one's hut? . . . The authorities have bunked, so it's up to you fellows to take the law into your own hands . . . for if you don't watch out, the thief will take your breeches off and carry away your hut on his shoulders. Look at Zotov now! There isn't any shame in him nor a tear. He's willing enough to talk a heap, but as for repenting he's not thinking of it a bit! Repent, scoundrel, did you get away with my Crow?" shouted Krutilin in a shrill voice, and from rage flung his hat on the ground.

"What if I did!" the blacksmith admitted sulkily, rolling a small cigar in his fingers and spitting out blood from blows he had received.

They were about to execute the sentence pronounced by strangers against the villain when, suddenly, Vasily Bragin stepped into the midst of the throng. He was low of stature, sharp of tongue, unmerciful of heart. His sickly eyes always emitted tears and he never looked anyone in the face, and for this reason the village valued and feared Vasily Bragin's judgments.

"I am thinking," he began, stroking his bristly grey hair in his habitual manner, "the blacksmith won't think again of fooling with other people's horses. . . ." He had in mind the blows the blacksmith had received

in the night. "Only why should one punish Zotov? We might as well shoot our horses with our own hands, and be done with it. We have but one blacksmith, fellow moujiks, for a whole district and a half . . . he shoes our mare, and our colt, and is a regular veterinary so to speak, and he stretches the hoop over the wheel. Zotov is the first nail in our management. It's too early to think of digging Zotov's grave! We're grateful to the soldier boys here . . . how they've devoted themselves to the war and live everywhere in military fashion . . . but now we'll speak straight, the chaps need a bit of work to do. But we're going to stand up for our blacksmith, and we shan't give him up to the soldier boys for amusement!" He paused for a respite and lifted his screwed-up eyes toward the mound from which Ivan was descending to the village; at that moment the speaker's tearful eyes looked dispassionately and sagely. "And to let such a chance pass is not to be thought of . . . to be sure, we ought to make a warning of death to wicked people. Fellow moujiks, we have but one blacksmith, and we have four carpenters. Now it seems to me we can easier spare a carpenter than the blacksmith. . . ."

He jumped down from the log and was immediately lost in the crowd. No one looked at Vasily Bragin, but everyone thought his thought and was in accord with his decision. At this moment Ivan, propelled by the perilous curiosity of a deaf man, nudged his way through the crowd into the circle. All were silent, and suddenly he observed that they were all looking at him. He was an orphan, he was a carpenter, he was a poor wretch, and there was no one to weep over him; he was guilty, because his guilt was necessary to the community. He smiled now to one side, now to the

other, but the faces in the crowd all assumed the same pattern, cold and forbidding.

"Submit, Ivan, it's all the same to you!" said an old man who stood nearest to him, warning him with a raised finger.

"Have a pity on the community, Vaniusha. You can see for yourself, horse thieves have overcome us . . . and we shan't forget you!"

"We'll bury you like our own son . . . Woh!" came a shout from behind, and the voice conquered by its real despair, but Ivan did not hear.

He was astonished at the hands outstretched towards him from all sides, but the crowd had already moved from the spot and drew him along beyond the village. Fearlessly smiling and making no attempt at justification, because not even in thought had he sinned against the world, he went with the crowd; he only thought that his misadventures had gone rather fast. It even seemed to him that he was deceiving the world with his nameless guilt—and this was the cause of his confused smile. Once outside the village, the crowd moved across the chaste snow of the fields; in the rear the old men briskly limped along, and in front ran the little children to witness Ivan's last misadventure. He was placed near a gully, and two soldiers, whose eyes deeper than those of the others were sunken under their foreheads, loaded their rifles. In the same instant, as during a betrothal, the women raised their voices.

It was a windy place, and in the driven snow were thrust upward the black heads of milfoil. Ivan tore one of them off and, after rubbing it between his fingers in a bewildered way he smelt its aroma, dense and poignant in the frosty air. He was still smiling and, on meeting the glance of the soldiers' screwed-up

eyes, comprehended much in his fate and, above all, his bitter nonconformity with the impetuous tempests of the world. Ivan again remembered the forgotten suit-case of his aunt's, his heritage, but this was no time to think about a suit-case.

"Greet Lenka for me!" was all he shouted into the air, where a bird soared, and for the second time in the course of the day his own silence merged with the silence of the world.

ALEKSEY N. TOLSTOY

Aleksey N. Tolstoy, born in 1882, is distantly related to the great Tolstoy. His mother belonged to the Turgenev family. He began his literary career in 1908 as a poet of promise. Two years later a book of his first short stories appeared and made an immediate success. A year later he abandoned poetry and devoted himself to prose. Unlike most Russians, he is not a man of ideas, but is primarily a teller of tales. His Russian is natural and simple, without any strain for "artistic" effects. His stories can have a great deal of charm when he does not allow the intrusion of ideas.

He fought on the White side during the Revolution, and was for a while one of the *émigrês* in Paris, but in 1921 he became reconciled with the Bolsheviks and returned to Russia, minus the title of Count. The two stories presented here are excellent examples of his latest manner. The first is particularly amusing, whether or not the Western reader agrees about the "bandits" of the Western world.

These stories are by no means the first stories by Tolstoy to be translated into English. There is already an existing version of his novel, *Khozhdenye po Mukam,* translated "Towards Golgotha."

# THE AFFAIR ON THE BASSEYNAYA STREET

*By* Aleksey N. Tolstoy

At the first glance the occurrence in the Basseynaya Street did not differ in any particular from a dozen other similar violations of the criminal code. An interest in the affair appeared only when the examining magistrate, the public prosecutor and the judges saw the faces of the participants in the crime, heard their frank testimony, investigated the details and drew from these the broadest generalizations. The decision of the court was undoubtedly influenced by the impression created by the speech of the counsel for the defense. He began thus:—

"The threads of the crime must be sought there where the film came from, a film which, if I may say so, the accused had followed five times with religious attention. . . . Let us go a little farther back and draw a true picture of the whole happening. . . ."

* * *

The sleepless life of the great boulevards was reflected in the pitch-black broad, wet pavements. On the asphalt, glistening with numberless puddles reflecting numberless flames, one could see a multitude of hurrying feminine legs, and the same hurrying legs in short skirts, topped by silk capes, could be seen upside down, reflected in the bottomless mirrors of the pavements. It seemed as if all life, like a sombre, inciting dream,

were turned topsy turvy. In any case, that was how Gilles Bonnot perceived it as he sauntered along the kerb, with lowered head, his hands thrust into the pockets of his velvet trousers.

By profession Gilles Bonnot was a scoundrel. If it were not for the police, especially the police on motor cycles, he might have allowed himself a great deal in this city, notwithstanding his shattered health (he suffered from a venereal disease, intestinal catarrh and some malady of the nerves). But Bonnot was neither stupid nor rash. He received a pension (a hundred and fifty francs) for a wound he had gotten in the War, and this small money made it possible for him to avoid enterprises involving over-great risks.

He desired much—all the luxury which passed him by in long-bodied motor cars along the Parisian boulevards, which were lighted like ballrooms. Above all, he wanted women. Perfumed, rose-complexioned, wicked-eyed women tormented him almost to the point of swooning. He knew what an amorous affair with one of the dears from among these beauties cost, and he could only grit his mutilated teeth while, from the kerb, he watched getting out of a car a long-limbed, half-naked girl, who lavished either dollars or pounds sterling. Gilles was convinced that he was afflicted with three maladies only because his blood had thickened from having no outlet for his desires. As he walked, his chilblains caused his spine to make a jerking movement, while his nostrils took in the odour of the crowd. He wandered without an objective, without any well-defined plan, like a wild beast making his way in a tropical night through a jungle.

Ahead of him there was an outpouring of rose-tinted radiance. All other flames paled before its light.

Women who passed through this light created by a multitude of mercurial lamps in the vestibule of a cinema house appeared waxen, their eyes gleamed like glass. On either side of the entrance was a screen bearing the many-tinted announcement:—"The Murder in the Rue Vaugirard." Something made Gilles pause, and blinking with inflamed eye-lids, he stood there a long time surveying the drawing of a man in evening dress and half-mask—with a blood-stained knife in his hand, this dandy was stepping across the dead body of a grey-haired old man. "It ought to be amusing," thought Gilles, clinking some coins in his pocket. He pulled out a handful of coppers and entered the vestibule.

* * *

Is it worth while to describe the film? First, there are the son of a banker and his wife—an example of a decorous woman, inclined to tears. Then, a mysterious handsome man, not of French origin, whose object is to seduce the banker's son's wife in order to obtain possession of their capital. Then, a courtesan, who is living in the midst of the maddest luxury. In the scenes descriptive of the courtesan's *ménage,* the French industry managed to throw a great deal of gold dust into the public's eyes—the darkened auditorium was filled with sighs of delight. The handsome man, of course, brings the banker's son into contact with the courtesan. The wife of the banker's son refuses food, and, with the adequate sympathy of the audience, she thaws into tears. The banker's son, it goes without saying, loses at cards and at the races, and here again the great tailoring houses and establishments of *de luxe* industry have an opportunity to

display their wares. Now he is ready to commit crime. And, indeed, a crime is committed. At first everyone is convinced that the grey-haired old man, money-lender that he was, had been killed by the banker's son. But as this did not seem quite right on the part of a banker's son, it becomes clear in the end that the murderer was none other than the mysterious handsome man.

Such a conclusion made Gilles laugh outright.

"What nonsense!" he said, turning to a neighbour on the right. "It's nothing but an elegant advertisement; something to stir the public of America and London. But there's no word of truth in it, except that the chap who had done in the old man in the Rue Vaugirard had gotten away from the police. Now, if they were to make the picture really as it happened. . . . Well, you remember, *mademoiselle*, how in November of the past year Paris raised such a howl about the 'Bloody business' in Rue Vaugirard—and if they were to show all those details—they would have something more funny. But this is good enough for foreigners. . . ."

Gilles mocked the picture to the very end. As he made his exit from the theatre he lighted a small cigar and for a minute or so remained standing in the broad entrance, bathed in the dazzling rose-tinted light. Let the little wenches hurrying in skin-coloured stockings across the black-mirrored asphalt turn their waxen muzzles at him and glide their glasslike eyes down his slouchy figure with its protruding jaw. There he was, Gilles Bonnot, a man known to none, notwithstanding which, a man about whom all this twaddle was created in twelve parts and three series from the life of bankers. It was he, Bonnot, who was to be seen both to the right and the left in the announcements in evening

dress and half mask, stepping across the dead body, and here he stands before you . . . Ha! Ha! . . .

Bonnot, indeed, had some justification for pride as he stood at the entrance of the theatre; because in November of the past year, in Rue Vaugirard, he had, without accomplices, killed a concièrge, an old man—he had done the deed with a razor—and robbed him of ten thousand francs; then, with the most delicate art, concealed all traces.

Yes, it had been a minute of glory, but a lonely one. And all that remained to him of his glory was four sous, hardly enough for a glass of cognac. He spat out his cigar, and, leaving the entrance of the theatre, plunged into the thickest part of the crowd, that he might, at least, breathe in the aroma of women.

* * *

Gilles Bonnot disappeared in the crowd. His further fate does not concern us. He had given a magnificent theme, without receiving a single centime from the film corporation; he had been stripped, he was of no further use. But the opulent film, "The Murder in Rue Vaugirard," went travelling round the world, shedding a lustre over the *de luxe* industry, over expensive women, agitating auditors with elegant horrors and inciting them to impossible dreams which tormented them as with a thirst infernal.

A year later the film found its way to the cinema house, "Old Nick," in Leningrad, on the Petersburg side. The inscriptions had been altered, the particularly nasty parts deleted, and the name of the picture changed to "The Worldly Bandits of Paris."

And so it happened that one evening in June Maria Oskolkina and Mikhail Tzibrikov came to look at the

worldly bandits. Maria was sixteen years old, Mikhail seventeen. Both of them left school during the Spring just past: Maria because she had attained her growth, Mikhail because Maria's short skirt had screened off the whole world from him. At this time Mikhail lived with his father, who kept a trinket shop in the Apraksin market; Maria, who was an orphan, with an aunt, who dealt in knitted goods. They hadn't enough money to keep up a separate establishment. Moreover Maria, or Mary (as she insisted on being called), after she had sold all her text-books and writing materials, with extraordinary rapidity developed a taste for all petty details of feminine adornment. Where she obtained money for stockings, pretty garters with bows, tiny boxes of powder, miniature flagons of perfumes and so forth, Mikhail never knew—it was all a secret, a tight secret. "If you want me to love you, don't ask me questions," she used to say to him.

And so, Mikhail and Mary, going into "Old Nick" and seating themselves in thirty-kopeck places, opened their mouths wide and stopped breathing, as the lighted screen revealed to their eyes life in the streets of Paris They felt their heads go round with excitement. So here was Paris! . . . So this was how real human beings lived—beautiful women, cocottes, world bandits, prodigiously elegant sons of bankers. . . .

Mary took Mikhail's hand and pressed her nails into it. He said nothing. Who was he to poke his nose into such a world with his eighteen roubles, with his big mouth and chicken-breast! . . . There was a strange gleam in Mary's eyes when the mysterious handsome man (the murderer to be), before a sumptuous mirror, was putting on his frock coat, such as one sees only in pictures. What socks, what a waist-coat! from

the parting in his hair to his shoes what a charming man. Mikhail sadly thought; this dandy would occupy Mary's dreams. . . . There! he was sprinkling himself with perfume, then he put on his gleaming top hat, smiled wickedly, and took out a dagger blade, and, with eyes fully a foot wide looked intently from the screen—into Mary's soul. . . .

* * *

"Misha, I must go to Paris. . . ."

"Mary dearest, of course, we'll go . . . sometime . . ."

"But the sooner the better—while I still have a slender figure and a divine complexion. . . ."

"But where's one to get the money? Well, I'm ready to sell my overcoat, my revolver, and . . . You might get something somewhere . . . only I'm afraid it won't be quite enough. . . ."

"Are you a man, or a little boy? Did you ever hear of a man who couldn't get money—bah!"

Mary glanced at Mikhail with pellucid eyes, wrinkled her upraised little nose, and contemptuously projected her lips. (Mary was the prettiest girl in Leningrad. Even passers-by in the street often remarked: "Look at the handsome little blonde! Quite Mary Pickford!")

"It's easier to get money in Paris," muttered Mikhail. "They don't crush personal initiative there."

"See that you don't lose me by such talk!"

"What d'you want me to do? Rob someone? I see no other way. . . ."

"Do you know, Misha, it seems to be you're wasting time in going after me. You've a wrong streak somewhere. Such youngsters don't give much confidence. . . ."

This conversation was carried on during an interval

between scenes. Once more the lights went out, and on the illumed screen shadows of a fabulous life continued to waver.

Mary left the "Old Nick" stumbling, seeing nothing. Mikhail was sullen and morose, and clumsily stepped into puddles.

The night rain had passed over Leningrad and laid the dust. The fresh sweet aroma of poplars came from the Kronversky Park. Mary reached the tramway stop and gave Mikhail the cold tips of her fingers.

"Goodbye. I'm going alone."

"Where?"

"It's none of your affair. . . ."

* * *

Five times Mary saw the film, "The Worldly Bandits." Each time she came to the film, where Mikhail awaited her, she was dressed more sumptuously. She had had her skirt cut short to three inches above the knee, wore a hat of the maddest colour, and silk stockings. Mikhail was even afraid to look at her, and grew increasingly morose.

"Mary, you have new shoes again—how do you manage it?"

"They're too tight. What a nuisance!"

"For heaven's sake, Mary, don't torture me! Who gives you presents?"

"Really, it's none of your business. You ought to be glad that I am yours."

Mikhail was tormented with an uncertain jealousy. His head ached—he thought so much of Paris, how to obtain money to get there? Only to take Mary away from Leningrad, to surround her with luxury, to

lavish precious things on her. And himself to dress in an evening cape, a top hat with eight linear gleams.

He sold his winter overcoat, all his books, a radio receiver, skates, felt boots, and borrowed trifles from various acquaintances to the extent of five roubles, and went one night to a gaming-house. He saw frock coats rise from the money on the green table, but in a few minutes his pockets were empty. He had lost. He wanted to hang himself on his braces in the closet, but didn't. At three o'clock in the morning he wept loudly, sitting on the embankment under the Egyptian sphinx. On the other side of the river the windows of the palaces flamed in the sunrise. The misty, azure Neva splashed at the feet of the heart-broken boy. In this night Mary roamed about, God alone knew where. Without doubt, someone at this moment was embracing her, while the still cool sun was rising behind the fortress from among long crimson morning clouds.

His suffering was becoming unbearable. Mikhail paced up and down, tears trickled down his cheeks and on to his clothing. "Yes," he thought, "it's necessary to decide. There's nothing left but to become a bandit, and, with a pocket full of money and a knife in my hand, to demand from Mary that she should betray me no more. . . ."

* * *

On the next day he made his decision known to Mary.

"I've tried everything. I've had no luck with cards. You can see, Mary, how much I love you. For your sake, I've seriously decided to become a bandit."

To this Mary replied: "You're a fool. In the bar on

the Mikhailovskaya I saw some real bandits. They're as bold as the devils, and gay too!"

"Very well, Mary, we'll see who's bolder!"

"You don't mean to say you've already arranged for something?" Mary asked, with curiosity. Big-mouthed Misha's answer had apparently pleased her.

"Perhaps," he muttered. "We shall see."

For some time he continued to play on her curiosity: he spoke vague dark words. But in the end he knew he must act. So he explained to Mary that he had been following a *Nepman*[1] (though the latter was armed to the teeth with a stout stick, a stiletto and a revolver), who suddenly had left for abroad, causing the affair to culminate prematurely. Mary believed him.

"Misha, did he have a lot of money?"

"He never carried less than six thousand roubles on his person, in a portfolio. . . ."

Without a word, Mary clasped her hands, and was wholly distraught at the thought of the things six thousand roubles could buy. From that moment her feverish head began to work in the same direction; it was necessary to find a new *Nepman* with six thousand roubles. Her attitude toward Mikhail changed—she at once realized all the advantages which might accrue from being a bandit.

"Misha, the main thing is, you mustn't be jealous," said Mary. "Even if I do go about with other men, it is only for our common advantage. I love you alone. And you and I shall go away together—to Paris!"

* * *

Mikhail waited for Mary in the Admiralty Park. He suddenly saw at a distance the familiar rose dress,

[1] A beneficiary of the New Economic Policy.

and rose hat, catching glints of sun in the pathway edged with trees. Mary's cheeks flushed. Without a greeting, she flung herself on the form beside him. She looked round—to the right, to the left.

"I've found one!"

"Well, who?"

"A *Nepman*. Very rich. Big money. Married, but interested in women, and an awful fool. All girls call him 'Auntie.' Well, Misha . . ." (Her blue eyes widened). "Well, Misha, it's no time for yawning. . . ."

"Let him but fall into my hands. I'll cut his guts out!"

* * *

Mary conducted Mikhail to the bar—to show him "Auntie." A single glance at the *Nepman* made Mikhail's heart jump to his throat. "Auntie" proved to be a stout male of enormous stature, with a fat, shaven, bluish face, in which there was something womanish. His forehead was overgrown with hair, almost to the eyebrows. He was dressed sumptuously—everything was new and strong. On a small finger he wore a large diamond. Surrounded by maidens, he good-naturedly imbibed his drink.

Mary whispered in Mikhail's ear:

"His family is in Moscow. He's stopping here for a while, attending to business. But they say, he's not here for long. So it's necessary to hurry."

She rose and with a peculiar gait, swinging her hips (which immediately incited Mikhail's jealousy) was about to walk past "Auntie." He stretched out a hand to her—the rays of the diamond radiated in all directions.

"Well, my little blonde, are you going to join us here?"

"I haven't the time," said Mary, refractorily.

But, having caught her hand, he drew her to him, and for a long time went on whispering in her ear. Mary freed herself and, shrugging her shoulders, walked away. Mikhail saw "Auntie" pulling out a handkerchief and wiping his fat face and neck under the silk collar.

This *Nepman* in the bar-room seemed like a vision from the remote, fabulous existence of the worldly bandits. All that followed was the affair of Mary alone; Mikhail only obeyed orders. She found a room with a separate entrance and key in the Basseynaya Street, where she could stay without registering (the landlady lived in Sestroretsk). She forced Mikhail to follow the movements of "Auntie" from bank to bank—to collect precise evidence of his financial operations. Within the little windows in banks, Mikhail saw thick bundles of roubles; it was clear that all this infinite wealth belonged to "Auntie." Mary and Mikhail were in a state of feverish excitement. Every evening the *Nepman* came to the bar, and showed an interest in Mary. But not once did she sit down at his table; always she taunted him from afar.

Then, when everything was ready, Mary said to Mikhail:

"Come tonight to the Basseynaya—at ten o'clock. Don't forget the revolver—bare hands won't do."

* * *

On his way home Mikhail bought a small bottle of brandy and consumed it in the park. He thought it would brace him, but chills continued to agitate his back. Until nine o'clock he lounged in his bed, smoked,

hid his head under the pillow, and snapped his fingers. When the clock in the dining-room, where his father was reading a newspaper, struck nine, Mikhail sprang from his bed, drew a revolver from the table-drawer, and hesitatingly made a sign of the Cross.

At ten o'clock he was in the Basseynaya Street. Mary opened the door to him. As she dragged him into the room, she whispered:

"You haven't met anyone on the stairs? Quietly now, quietly, not a word. You smell of vodka! Ah, you're afraid!"

"Nothing of the sort! You're afraid yourself. . . ."

"Don't shout. And don't make a noise with your heels. Listen to me carefully. You remain here, while I go—When you hear me come back with him, you hide behind these portières. And mind you, stand there, without stirring, without breathing, no matter what I do. When I am sure he's quite drunk, I'll clap my hands. That will be a signal for you to jump out with your revolver. . . ."

Mary put on her rose hat, quickly dabbed powder on her face, arranged her curls before the mirror and ran out. Mikhail was left alone. What did he go through in the two hours before the appearance of the *Nepman*? He could give no lucid account of it afterward—but it is certain that in his agitation he drank a large decanter of water, and consumed still more water from the pitcher intended for washing.

Precisely at twelve o'clock he heard Mary's kittenish giggle, followed by the turning of the key in the lock. Mikhail vanished like a spectre behind the portières which concealed the door cut out in the main wall, and there he stood, bathed in sweat, with difficulty repressing an inclination to sneeze.

Mary was the first to enter the room, she was followed by the *Nepman* carrying champagne and fruit. In his pause from bodily exertion in mounting the stairs he breathed heavily, and immediately flung himself into the armchair. Without cease, Mary talked, giggled, and, for no apparent reason, paced the room. "Auntie" tried to catch her and sit her on his knees, while she, with a laugh, eluded him. Then he pulled a cork, with a pop. He said:

"Well, if we're to drink, let's drink—though I can't say that I'm inclined that way. I get drunk so quickly."

"Oh! As for me, if I told you how much I loved champagne you wouldn't believe it!' said Mary, shrilly. "I could drink three bottles."

"What shall we drink to?"

"To your future. . . ."

"You've touched a weak spot, my dear. To a better future! Why, the devil take it, my wench, you shan't even dream of the sort of life we used to live. We ate on silver plates at the Villa Roda.[1] As for women —well, they were something to lose your wits over. And now I must be satisfied with such crumbs as you. Now, now, don't take it so. . . ."

"Well, I will. Anyhow, do have another glass!"

"Come to me! What a little dodger you are!"

"I'll sit down. Only you must drink!"

"To what now?"

"To our relations in the future."

"So that's what you're driving at. Well, I'll have a look—what a tid-bit you are. . . ."

He uncorked the second bottle. Mary sat on his knees, kicking her legs. He was tipsy, and he went on

[1] Notorious pre-revolutionary restaurant, much frequented by Rasputin.

kissing Mary. She still gave no sign—she was drinking, laughing, and throwing orange rinds at the mirror. . . .

Stunned, unhappy, afraid to breathe, Mikhail stood behind the portières. He wanted to fling himself on the *Nepman*, beat him, kick him out of doors! How dare he kiss Mary, rock her on his knees, laughing smugly. But Mikhail dared not even stir. The vokda he had consumed, together with the tremendous quantity of water, deprived him of his last manhood. At that moment he felt something terrible was about to happen. . . .

"No, no, please don't, wait a little. . . . Let me go," came the plaintive voice of Mary.

Then, in all his despair and degradation, Mikhail, behind the portières, suddenly broke into sobs, his revolver slipped from his hand and fell heavily on the parquet floor. Then there was a silence.

"Whom have you there?" asked "Auntie" hoarsely.

"Cur, poltroon!" Mary tore herself from his knees; flung the portières open. Her face flushed with anger and excitement. "Cry-baby!" With all her might she struck the big-mouthed boy across his face. "Well, f-fool!" She snatched the revolver, and turning, approached the *Nepman*. He immediately straightened in his chair, raised his hands. His jaw dropped. With staring eyes he looked into the dark hole of the revolver.

"Money—or I shoot!" said Mary.

"I have no money with me," said "Auntie," snapping his jaws. "Don't shoot, listen . . . "

"Money! If you cry out, then . . . "

"I have money at home—it's with my partner—I don't carry money about with me."

Such a turn of affairs was expected by neither Mary nor Mikhail, who stood behind her with clenched fists and distorted face. Mary pushed the revolver forward. "Auntie" himself found a way out of the difficult situation.

"Don't fool about with that," he muttered. "It's sure to go off. The devil take you! I'll give you money, but it's necessary to go after it. . . ."

Quickly Mary pulled off some of her underclothes, and ordered Mikhail to tear it into strips. "Auntie" stretched his legs, which were then bound together. With groans, squinting at the revolver in Mary's hand, he wrote a note. (It is curious that Mary did not name a figure, and that "Auntie" himself indicated it, in their sight, on the note.) Mikhail immediately went to the given address. For forty minutes Mary kept the *Nepman* looking into the bore of the revolver, and only now and then took an orange from the fruit basket and peeled it with her teeth.

"Be quiet, don't stir," she repeated, spitting out the pits.

"Auntie" tried to coax her, to shame her with his wheedling voice, and even reminded her of his little children in Moscow. Mary was inexorable, like a real bandit. At last Mikhail returned with the money. He brought ninety roubles in all. . . .

"In God's truth, that's all I have!" wailed "Auntie." "The next time, perhaps, I'll have the pleasure to . . . What? That's not enough? Well, shoot away, you wretches, if you don't believe me!"

Mary counted the money. Stuck them into her stocking. With a spiteful gesture drew her small hat on.

"Very well. Unbind him, Misha! Now, listen to me, 'Auntie.' We're going out. If you follow us, we'll

shoot you on the stairs. . . . You may leave only in ten minutes."

"In the meanwhile," said the *Nepman* after the departing couple and, sniffing, stretched out his hand towards the bottle.

* * *

In a few days Maria Oskolkina and Mikhail Tzibrikov were arrested in Sebastopol. They at once confessed to everything. Mikhail bawled and repented. Mary maintained a half-indifferent, half-contemptuous demeanour. They were conveyed to Leningrad. And now, the counsel for the defence, concluded his speech in court with the following words:

" . . . I ask the Court to look at the sufferer—the plaintiff—regard his great physical strength, his extraordinary capacity for combination which he habitually practises in his business affairs . . . " (At these words "Auntie" began to work his way towards the door, and a titter passed through the court room.) "Now regard these children, deluded by the allurements of the West. . . . These two romantics of a new order, these two frequenters of the cinema, bind a man who, with a single movement of a hand, might have crushed them both, as if they were flies. And the chief thing, the thing I wish to emphasize, is that the revolver, which had played such a significant rôle in the affair, was not loaded." (Mary, with fury, looked at Mikhail, whose head, however, was bowed low.) "In any case, no one could have in any circumstances shot with this revolver, because it was old, rusty and broken. . . . "

* * *

The court passed a sentence of five years on Maria and Mikhail Tzibrikov—conditionally.

# A WHITE NIGHT

*By* ALEKSEY N. TOLSTOY

In a tiny private chamber of the Caucasian Restaurant Sans Souci (in Leningrad, on the Mikhailovskaya) it was crowded, but cosy. Three persons were sitting in it. One was a professor, a great gourmand; a man possessing in the highest degree an equable temperament. The second was a theatrical manager, who was drinking bitters for the disorders of the heart. The third was a man having but little relation to the story.

They touched glasses, muttering; and, for a snack, partook of fried smelts.

The smelt is an excellent fish. Now, as in Pushkin's and Peter the Great's time, the same step-sons of Nature throw their nets into the grey waters of the Neva opposite the palaces, where in the dusty windows the sunrise is reflected, where the Russian Empire has had its day, and, without turning to look at the tramways crossing the bridges or paying attention to the whistles of the tow-boats—as if the whole city and its passers-by, and its passions, and its whole history, were nothing more than a dream in the Petersburgian fogs—they drag into their skiffs the life-quivering cosmos: the silvery smelt. Afterwards, conveying it in baskets, they at once sell it on the pavement of the

Summer Garden, on the Panteleymonovskaya, on the cross-roads of the Petrograd side. It is a very tasty little fish, and is cheap.

A friendly chat went on in the tiny chamber. The theatrical manager, as always, expressing himself mistily, was speaking, while drops of sweat gleamed on his livid bald skull:

"Consider the horse. . . . The horse is always silent. The horse can't speak. No! . . . " (He raised a finger, and while he held it thus poised, there was silence.) "A horse also feels pain. In a circus . . . Ah, yes, I've seen it myself. They forced a horse to use its muzzle to write on paper. Write, learned horse, and tell of your pain! Slap, slap!—went the horse, smearing the paper with its muzzle. Only spittle, but not words. It can't write about its pain. A dumb beast. Yet it feels pain. Ah! . . . " (Once more the upraised finger, and a pause.) "And so it goes on—with its muzzle across the paper—slap, slap! . . . And that's all. . . . As for tears? Maybe, there were tears —I couldn't see. . . . I don't know."

There was now no room for doubt that the horse which was unable to speak was—he himself. The tale was misty, and very lugubrious. Behind the windows of the Sans Souci, draped with curtains, the white night, with quiet frenzy, poured out its seductions. The broken heart of the theatrical manager wept bitterly. He had been abandoned by the woman he loved. He felt humiliated. But no tears appeared on the surface, only drops of sweat on his drunken bald head.

The professor did not like emotionalism. He found a first cause for everything. He had greater peace that way. The foolish girl who had run away from the theatrical manager was not worth these tears.

"Let's have a drink," he said earnestly, filling the glasses. "Look at things more simply. You've experienced a traumatic shock to your sexual system. Why drag in symbols? Well, here's . . . " (He touched glasses with his companions.)

"The horse is silent," repeated the theatrical manager, passing a bent finger across his skull. "The horse suffers."

"Fiddlesticks! . . . Try a purgative, old man! Get rid of your romanticism. . . . "

"It's not right to humiliate a horse. . . . A horse can't speak. . . . "

(A tear trickled down the theatrical manager's nose and fell on the paper table-cloth, upon which the third person present, who has no connection with the story, was drawing the legs of a woman.)

With lengthened cheeks, his spectacles lowered, the professor said didactically:

"An excessive production of hormones is proceeding in the shaken glands. They irritate the nervous system. The nerves experience an inner irritation, without external reflexes. There being no reflexes, the organism itself speedily devises substitutes. There's your primal basis for the mystical consciousness and all sorts of romanticism. If you don't stop this manufacture of hormones, there's no telling where it may not end. In a course of a week or so you'll be making assaults on women. You will witness a practical demonstration of the processes of hooliganism."

The theatrical manager lowered his head and began to sob. His scalp, between his tightened fists, resembled the moon peering across the edge of the table. Generally speaking, in amatory matters, both were wrong —the professor as well as the theatrical manager. And

behind the window-blinds the night ran amuck in Leningrad. Boats glided on the rivers and canals, guitars strummed: there resounded women's low laughter. On the islands, in the parks, illumed by a dead light, the nightingales sang; and those who sought love roamed about here, as well as those who had already found it. They managed it without the aid of the professor or the theatrical manager. They sang songs and strummed on guitars.

Besides these, there also roamed about here—it's no use closing one's eyes to sin—personalities with artificial reflexes (like mystics and romantics), oversupplied with hormones. . . . Come to think of it—what a painful thing is this northern night in June!

And lo, from out of the white languor of the night —the devil alone knows wherefrom and for what purpose—into the small private chamber of the Sans Souci, where amid layers of tobacco smoke the professor was mixing a cup, there flew like a moth toward the flame a tipsy woman, or, speaking more accurately, a girl in her teens.

She had flung open the door and paused, surveying with her dark-grey eyes the twenty-stone torso of the professor mixing the contents of a jug with a spoon.

"Aha!" he said. "Come in! . . . That's another with false reflexes."

Then the girl impetuously went up to the divan, pulled her hat off, and fell behind the theatrical manager's back. It was to be seen that she was asleep even while she was walking from the door to the divan.

"Now this I understand," said the professor. "She's gone to pieces."

The face of the sleeping girl was pale and lovely. The mouth was slightly open. There was a broken comb

in the chestnut-brown hair, trimmed short. She was tall and slender, like a boy. Her sharp-elbowed arms were flung out. The frock showed a rip under the arm-pits. The thickish legs of the girl were attired in cheap rose-coloured stockings. The slippers were much worn. Her neck was delicate and chaste. She slept so soundly that the eyelids gave the impression of death.

There was horror in the face of the theatrical manager. He looked around wildly at the sleeping girl. The dirty wrist of her hand, encircled by a green gutta-percha bracelet, fell on his knees. He sprang up, stretched himself.

"No, no! I don't want to!" he cried.

When he jumped up, the girl was shaken by the springs. She began to turn on a side. The hand with the bracelet slipped from the divan. The dark head irresistibly followed, then the long leg in the rose-coloured stocking. The girl rolled under the table. The liquor in the goblets splashed over.

"Smelling-salts!" shouted the professor.

They raised the girl and seated her. They held the smelling-salts to her nostrils. They moistened her forehead. Slowly her grey eyes opened.

"Please, no more smelling-salts," she said, in a child-like voice.

The theatrical manager shouted:

"Why did you fall? Why are you drunk? Why did you come to us? Who are you? An infant? A street-walker? Answer!"

"Nothing of the sort," she replied falteringly. "I am not a street-walker. I was given drink. Then they behaved so badly that I was forced to leave the restaurant. I walked and walked and walked. I walked the whole length of the street. . . . I came in here. . . .

I'd like some pickled cucumbers," she murmured with a sigh.

The theatrical manager pierced her with his eyes. It was as if the girl in the torn frock, who crisply ate one cucumber after another, and even flushed with pleasure, were the cause of his distress and came there as a messenger from all women to mock him: "See what we are . . . you are crying, and we are eating cucumbers. . . . "

A thousand times right was the professor in his statement about false reflexes. This short-haired girl, with handsome, nonchalant eyes, flaunted herself before the inflamed reflexes of the tormented theatrical manager—and it now seemed to him that not for nothing was she in black, not for nothing had she flown into the Sans Souci; she had mystically arisen out of the frenzied quiet of the white night. Who knew, perhaps, under her frock there was a witch's tail. . . .

His scalp held tight in his hands, the theatrical manager paced the chamber.

"It's awful. . . . Terrible. . . . One loves, waits and suffers. . . . And what does she want? . . . She's a bird. . . . A phantom out of the river mists. . . . A street-walker. . . . "

"Why do you scold?" said the girl. "I repeat, I am not a street-walker. Why, I finished high school at Perm. I come from there, half-way in the train, half on foot. You see, I had been robbed. . . . Tomorrow I'll throw myself under the tram. . . . "

The theatrical manager only grit his teeth. Even the professor's brain floated away somewhere with the tobacco smoke. He shook his grey head and began to establish a first cause:

"What is your name, citizenness?"

"Katya. . . . I'm from Perm, as I said. I'll prove to you that I'm from there. Look, there's a scar on this side of my head. When the Whites took Perm, a bullet grazed my head here—through the window. And now feel on this side—another scar. . . . When the Reds took Perm, a splinter struck me here . . . while I was in the street. . . . Do you believe me now? I am twenty-one years old."

She drew out her comb to straighten out her disordered chestnut-brown hair. She saw that the comb was broken, and flung it on the table.

"Hang it! Now I've no comb!"

"Never mind!" said the theatrical manager hoarsely. "I'll buy you a dozen of combs. . . . Only explain why you came here. Why do you run about in the night?"

"Why?—what does it matter? This concerns only me. When my kindred died, I went to Tambov to my aunt. I thought I should put my life in order. On the way I was robbed—to the last penny. I got to Tambov —but no aunt there. The devil's own work! I didn't lose courage. I wouldn't let them down me. I applied at a ballet establishment. They found I had talent. And in the Spring I made for Leningrad, on foot, mind you . . . because they had better establishments here. . . . But I found myself unable to move. . . . "

"How? What d'you mean?"

"I had no money. . . . I'm tired of it all. . . . In the morning I'll throw myself under the tram," she said, indifferently.

The theatrical manager again began to pace the chamber, his head in his hands.

"I don't understand anything. . . . Who is she? What does she want? Who sent her here?"

"She's simply lying," said the professor. "Chuck

this romanticism of yours! . . . And just look how we've filled the room with smoke—one can hardly breathe."

As if she had not heard this colloquy, the girl went on:

"And so here I wander and wander round this accursed city. . . . I want to live. . . . I want to eat. . . . I have nothing, only one wretched frock. You are *Nepmen*.[1] You have comfortable beds to sleep in. . . . Such has been my welcome. But in Perm I have some property—a trunkful of dresses, and a fine samovar. The fare there is thirty roubles. How am I to get the money? I put my name down at the labour exchange. They've promised me a job in a thread factory. I can't make my mind up. That means good-bye to my art, good-bye to the ballet, an end to my artistic career. . . . " (Her lips quivered visibly.) "Nothing left but to put my head on the tramway lines. . . . "

"Katya!" The theatrical manager sprang to the table, caught her by her frail hands, and his eyes ate into hers. "Has someone taken advantage of you? When? Was it long ago?—Only what? Tell me everything. . . ."

Then the girl, without withdrawing her hands, without showing displeasure, burst into a storm of tears. She was silent. No matter how much the theatrical manager urged her to speak, she only shook her head. As for the professor, who even without words had grasped the first cause, he had grown morose.

"Katya," bellowed the theatrical manager, "you're alone, and I'm alone! The white night has sapped our souls. We are both of us weary. But we shan't come

[1] Beneficiaries of the New Economic Policy.

together. . . . No. . . . Don't expect it. . . . Don't hope for it. . . . We are remote from one another. . . . Without love I won't ever approach you. . . . Only as a friend, understand—as a brother. . . . As one near to you through suffering. . . . "

And the theatrical manager talked such twaddle about his feelings that the professor only made a despairing gesture with his arms, while the girl moved away, frowning.

When the theatrical manager's head once more appeared on the edge of the table like the lunar orb, the girl rose and, with both hands, began arranging her small soft hat on her head.

"Can you spare three roubles?" she asked, looking askance.

She was given three roubles. She grasped them tightly in her small fist, and went to the door. She turned, and suddenly her expression changed, became mocking:

"You may call me a street-walker, if you like. That means nothing. . . . And don't you worry about me. . . . Forgive me, if I don't throw myself under the tram just to give you pleasure. I can scratch when it's necessary. . . . "

And she disappeared behind the dusty hangings.

There was no reason for remaining there longer. They paid the bill, then nudged the theatrical manager, suggesting to him that in any case it was necessary to go home. They issued into the street, which was plunged in a lunar mist; there were no shadows on the damp blocks of the wooden pavement, and the windows were asleep. The clouds in the east shot out rose-gold feathers which hung above the city.

A woman, her head wrapped in a kerchief, was chalking the rails. Flocks of boy and girl students were pass-

ing by at some distance. Their voices were clear, with a sense of dawn. They hurried, lest the bridges be drawn before they could cross over to the islands.

The third person, having no relation to our story, took the professor under the arm.

"What is she, do you think?"

"A lonely soul."

"I understand. But what—a street-walker?"

"How shall I tell you. . . . The wheel of life whirls fast nowadays . . . all's chaos. . . . "

"Night! . . . Night. . . . What weariness . . . I can't stand it any longer . . . " groaned the theatrical manager, getting into a cab.

ISAAC BABEL

An able Russian critic affirms that Isaac Babel is the first Jewish writer to enter Russian literature as a Russian writer. He adds: "Babel is heir to Maupassant in the structure of his stories and to Flaubert in the structure of phrase." Another Russian critic compares him to Gogol and John Synge. All these assertions, however extravagant they may seem, have some truth. Certainly, no one has written as well about the Cossacks since Gogol, and no one has raised vernacular to such a pitch of beauty except Synge. Babel's stories have, in their phrasing, the quality of "pure poetry," and we have it on Prince Mirsky's authority that many Russians know such stories as "The Letter" and "Salt" by heart and love to recite them aloud. There is an epic, an heroic, quality present in *Konarmia* ("Horse Army"), a record of the exploits of Budeny's Red Army, absent in contemporary literatures. And this quality is by no means spoilt by an equally great gift for irony but is actually heightened by it.

Babel was born in 1894, in Odessa. He is the son of a Jewish tradesman, who however insisted on his son, as a boy, studying Hebrew, the Bible and the Talmud. For a while he attended the Commercial High School, where he came under the influence of the French instructor, M. Vadon, who inspired him with a love of the French classics. Babel's first stories were written in French, when the boy was only fifteen. The first Russian stories to win fame were written about the Jews of Odessa, and they have the same epic quality as the later stories about the Cossacks, with whom he served during their campaign against the Poles and the Whites. Babel's output is very small, and there is much speculation as to what he will do next.

# THE LETTER

*By* Isaac Babel

Here is a letter home, dictated to me by a youngster in our detachment named Kurdiakova. It does not deserve oblivion. I wrote it down without embellishment, and I present it here word for word, without the least exaggeration.

"My dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna.

"In the first lines of this letter I hasten to let you know that, thanks to God, I am alive and well, and I wish I could hear the same from you. I likewise greet you—I humbly bow to you, my white face touching the damp ground. . . ." (Here follows a list of kinsmen, godfathers and godmothers. But we'll let this pass. Let us look to the next paragraph.)

"My dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna Kurdiakova. I hasten to write to you that I find myself in the Red Horse Army of comrade Budeny, and here also is to be found your godfather, Nikon Vasilyitch, who at the present time is a Red hero. They took me into the expedition of the Politotdel, where we transport to the positions literature and newspapers—the Moscow *Izvestia* and the Moscow *Pravda* and our own merciless *Red Cavalryman*, which every fighter in the front line likes to read, after which, with heroic spirit, he slashes the filthy Polish gentry, and I am living very handsomely with Nikon Vasilyitch.

"My dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna. Send me

anything that's in your power to send. I beg you to kill the speckled boar and send the parcel addressed to Vasily Kurdiakov, in the Politotdel of Comrade Budeny. Every night I lie down to rest hungry and without any blankets, so that I am mighty cold. Write me a letter about my Stepa, if he's alive or not, I beg you to let me know all about him—if he still has the hitch, and also if he still has the scabs on his fore-legs, and if he has been shoed or not? I beg you, my dear mother, Evdokia Feodorovna, wash his fore-legs without fail with soap, which I left behind the images, and if father used up the soap, then please buy some in Krasnodar and may God reward you. I am also able to tell you that the country here is quite poor, the moujiks with their horses hide from our Red eagles in the woods, there is little wheat to be seen and it is so small we laugh at it. The owners sow rye, the same with oats. Hops here grow on sticks, it all looks in order; they make illegal spirits with it.

"After this I want to tell you in this letter about father, how he killed my brother Feodor Timofeitch Kurdiukov a year or thereabouts since. Our Red brigade of Comrade Pavlichenko attacked the town Rostov, when there was treachery in our ranks. At that time father was commander of a company in Denikin's army. The people that have seen them, those people said they wore medals on them like during the old regime. And because of that treachery we were all made prisoners and brother Feodor Timofeitch came under father's eyes. And father began to cut Fedya about, saying—you filthy hide, you red dog, you son of a bitch and the like and they cut him about until dusk, until brother Feodor Timofeitch died. I then wrote you a letter, how your Feodya was lying under ground

without a cross. But father catched me with that letter and he said: 'You are mother's children, her roots are in you, and she a tart, I bellied your mother and I'll belly her some more, my life's gone as it is, I'll destroy my own for truth and much more the like of it. I suffered from them like the Saviour Jesus Christ.' Only soon I ran away from father and managed to reach my detachment of Comrade Pavlichenko. And our brigade received an order to go to the town of Voronezh to fill its quota there and we filled our quota there, and we also got some horses, kit-bags, revolvers and everything we wanted. About Voronezh, dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna, I can tell you that it's a fine little town, bigger than Krasnodar, the people in it are very handsome, the river fit for bathing. They gave us two pounds of bread a day there, half a pound of meat and enough sugar, so that on getting up we drank sweet tea, we did the same in the evening and forgot what hunger was, as for dinner I went to brother Semyon Timofeitch for pancakes or roast-goose and after that I would lie down to rest. At that time because of his desperate bravery the whole regiment wanted Semyon Timofeitch for commander and Comrade Budeny sent such an order and he received two horses, excellent clothes, a cart for his equipment all to himself and the order of the Red Standard, and they knew me for his brother. And now if some neighbour tries to bother you any—then Semyon Timofeitch has the right to cut him up. Then we began to go after General Denikin, and we drove him straight into the Black Sea, only we couldn't see father anywhere and Semyon Timofeitch looked for him everywhere in all the lines, because he missed so much his brother Fedya. Only you see, dear mamma, as you know father for

his obstinate character, so this is what he did—he brazenly painted his red beard and made it black in the town of Maikop in mufti, so that no one in town knew that he was a policeman under the old regime. But there's no getting away from truth, your godfather Nikon Vasilyitch saw him by chance in the cottage of an inhabitant and he wrote Semyon Timofeitch a letter. We hopped on our horses and galloped two hundred versts—I, brother Senka and some other lad who wanted to join in the fun.

"And what did we see in the town of Maikop? We saw that the people who lived in the rear had no kind of sympathy for the fighters at the front and everywhere in town we saw nothing but treachery and Jews, just as in the old regime. And Semyon Timofeitch was as large as life there wrangling with the Jews, who would not let father go but put him in gaol under lock and key, saying—an order had come from comrade Trotsky not to kill the prisoners, we ourselves will judge him, don't growl, he'll get what's coming to him. But Semyon Timofeitch got his way and proved that he was the commander of the regiment and had from Comrade Budeny all the orders of the Red Standard and threatened to do them all in, those who held on to father and refused to give him up and the other lads from our camp were with him in this. But as soon as Semyon Timofeitch got hold of father he began to lay on him with a whip and drew up his men around him like they do on parade. And then Senka splashed some water on father Timofey Rodionovitch and the water trickled red down his beard. And Senka asked Timofey Rodionovitch:

" 'How d'you like it, father, being in my hands?'

" 'No,' said father, 'I don't like it?'

"Then Senka asked:

" 'And when you cut up Fedya, did he like being in yours hands?'

" 'No,' said father, 'Fedya didn't like it.'

"Then Senka asked:

" 'And did you think then, father, that your turn would come?'

" 'No,' said father, 'I didn't think my turn would come.'

"Then Senka turned to the crowd and said:

" 'And it's my opinion that if I get into your hands, then no mercy will be shown me. And now, father, we'll put an end to you. . . . '

"And Timofey Rodionovitch began insolently to curse Senka and did not spare mother nor the Virgin and he hit Senka on the jaw and Semyon Timofeitch sent me from the yard, so that I can't, dear mamma Evdokia Feodorovna, describe to you how they finished father, because I was sent away from the yard.

"After that we had our camp moved to the town of Novorossiysk. As for this town I can tell you that on the other side of it there isn't any dry land but only water, the Black Sea, and we stayed there as late as May, when we went to the Polish front and are beating up the Polish gentry in proper fashion. . . .

"I remain your loving son Vasily Timofeitch Kurdiukov. Dear mamma, be sure to look after Stepka and God will reward you. . . . "

This is Kurdiukov's letter, word for word. When I finished writing it for him, he took the covered sheet and hid it in his bosom, next to the skin.

"Kurdiakov," I asked the boy, "was your father a wicked man?"

"My father was a dog," he replied gloomily.

"And is your mother better?"

"I've nothing to complain of there. Here's our family, if you'd like to have a look. . . . "

He handed me a broken photograph. On it was Timofey Kurdiukov, a broad-shouldered police-officer in uniform, with a well-combed beard, motionless, with high cheek-bones, with a gleam in his colourless, insipid eyes. At his side, in a bamboo armchair, was a tiny peasant woman in a loose blouse, with emaciated, bright, timid features. And against the wall, with its pitiful provincial background of flowers and pigeons, two young men were postured—monstrously huge, stupid, broad-shouldered, stary-eyed, moping as if at lessons—the two Kurdiukov brothers, Feodor and Semyon.

# SALT

## *By* Isaac Babel

Dear Comrade Editor. I want to write to you about some silly women, who are injurious to our cause, I trust that when you made the rounds of the citizens' fronts, which you have undertaken to observe, you did not overlook the ancient station of Fastov, to be found beyond the many lands, in a remote kingdom far, far away, of course I was there, and drank illegal beer, it wet my moustaches but missed the mouth.* Concerning this afore-mentioned station there is much one can write, but as the saying goes in our simple life—there's no use in bothering with the muck of gentry. And so I will describe to you only that which my eyes have actually seen.

It was a fine quiet night seven days ago, when our worthy train of the Horse Army stopped there, loaded with warriors. We were all burning to further our cause and we were going in the direction of Berditchev. But we soon saw that our train was not going on, that our engine stopped dead, and the warriors began to suffer doubts and to talk the matter over between themselves—why was the train stopping here? And really, the stopping here was great for our cause, for we found it over-run with bagmen,** these evil enemies, among whom also was to be found an in-

* This sentence is written in imitation of the conventional ending of some Russian fairy tales.

** Small tradesmen, carrying on illegal trade, so called because of the bags which contain their wares.

finite number of the fair sex, they used the railways in insolent fashion. Without fear, they caught at the hand rails, these evil enemies, they trotted at will on the tops of the railway vans, they did fuss and carry on a lot, and everyone had in his hands, known to all, a sack of salt, weighing sometimes five *poods** to the sack. But not for long did the capital of the bagmen keep up its triumph. The initiative of the warriors, who climbed out of their vans, gave the worsted authority of the railway men a chance to breathe. Only the fair sex alone with their bags remained in the neighbourhood. Taking pity, the warriors let some women come into the vans with them, and others they would not let in. And in our van of the second platoon we found ourselves face to face with two maidens, and when the first bell rang there came up to us a respectable-looking woman with a child, saying:

"Please let me in, dear little Cossacks, during the whole war I've suffered at railway stations with a babe in arms and now I want to see my husband, but on account of the railway it is impossible to make the journey, surely I deserve better of you, dear little Cossacks?"

"Woman, I must tell you at the very start," say I to her, "as the platoon decides, so your fate shall be." And, turning to the platoon, I explain to them that this respectable woman begs to be allowed to go see her husband at the place of appointment and the child is really with her and so what is your decision—is she to be allowed to come in or not?

"Let her in!" the lads cry. "After us, she won't want a husband!"

* A pood is about 36 pounds.

"No," I say to the lads sufficiently politely, "I bow low to you, comrades of the platoon, but I'm really astonished to hear you go on with this stallion talk. Remember, comrades of the platoon, your life and how you yourselves were once children by your mothers, and it comes to that it doesn't become you to talk like this. . . ."

And the Cossacks, talking it over among themselves, what sort of persuasive fellow this Balmashev was, began to let the woman into the van, and she with gratitude crawling in. And everyone, boiling over with my truth, helps her to be comfortable-like, one outdoing the other:

"Sit yourself, woman, in the corner there, and love your child after the fashion of mothers, no one will touch you in the corner there, and you'll arrive, untouched, to your husband's, as your desire is, and we count on your conscience that you'll do the right thing by the young, for what is old is getting older, and what is young there's not much of. We've seen grief, woman, real and often almost beyond endurance, and hunger oppressed us, and cold consumed us. But you, woman, sit here, and must not doubt us. . . ."

The third bell having sounded, the train moved. And a fine night opened before us like a tent, studded with stars. And the warriors remembered the nights in Kuban and the green Kuban star. And the memory flew past like a bird. While the wheels go on whirring, whirring. . . .

After a passage of time, when the night was relieved at her post and the Red drummers began to beat the tattoo on their red drums, then the Cossacks came up to me, seeing that I had been sitting without sleep and seemed in the depths of despair.

"Balmashev," the Cossacks said to me, "why do you look so down in the mouth and sit there without sleep?"

"I bow low to you, warriors, and I beg slight forgiveness, only allow me to exchange a few words with this citizenness. . . . "

And trembling in all my body, and rising from my cot, from which sleep had flitted, like a wolf from a pack of evil hounds, I walk up to her and take the child from her arms and tear away its swaddling and rags and, behold, under the swaddling and the rags there's a small *pood* of salt.

"Here's an interesting child, comrades, which doesn't ask for teats, doesn't wet his clothes, and doesn't disturb folks in their sleep. . . . "

"Forgive me, dear little Cossacks," breaks in the woman on our conversation very cold-bloodedly, "it wasn't I that fooled you, it was my evil spirit. . . . "

"Balmashev will forgive your evil spirit," I answer the woman. "That doesn't cost Balmashev much, what Balmashev has paid for a thing, for the same price he sells it. But turn, woman, to the Cossacks, who have exalted you as a hard-working mother in the Republic. Turn to these two maidens, who are weeping at this moment as sufferers from us during this night. Turn to our wives in our wheaten Kuban, who are spending their woman's strength without their husbands, and these men not less lonely, from no wicked will of their own, violating girls who cross the path of their lives. . . . But they did not touch you, though it is only such as you that ought to be touched. Then turn to Russia, in agonies of pain. . . . "

Then she to me:

"I've brought my own salt, I'm not afraid of the

truth. You're not thinking of Russia, you're saving the Jews Lenin and Trotsky. . . . "

"We're not discussing the Jews now, you wicked citizenness. Jews have nothing to do with this. And let me tell you, I'll not speak up for Lenin, but Trotsky is the desperate son of the Governor of Tambov and, though of another class, has joined up with the workers as their champion. As sentenced hard labour prisoners, they are pulling us out—are Lenin and Trotsky—on to the free road of life, and you, base citizenness, are more of a counter-revolutionary than that White general, the same who with a sharp sword and a thousand men on horse is threatening us. . . . He, that general, is to be seen from all the roads, and the worker has his thought and dream of cutting him up, but you, countless citizenness, with your interesting children, which don't beg for bread and don't run out to the wind,—you're as invisible as a flea, and you gnaw, and gnaw, and gnaw. . . . "

And I really must admit that we threw this citizenness from the moving train down the slope, but she, coarse creature that she was, sat for a little while, then shook her skirts and walked on in her vile path. And seeing this injurious woman and great Russia all around her and the peasants' meadows without an ear of corn, and the abused maidens, and the comrades, who go in such numbers to the front and return so few, I wanted to jump out of the moving train and to put an end to myself or to her. But the Cossacks had pity on me and said:

"Give her one from your rifle!"

So taking from the wall my faithful rifle, I wiped this infamy from the face of the workers' earth and the republic.

And we, warriors of the second platoon, take the oath before you, dear comrade editor, and before you, comrade colleagues, to treat ruthlessly all traitors who are dragging us into an abyss and who want to turn the course of the river back and to cover Russia with dead bodies and dead grass.

For all warriors of the second platoon

Nikolai Balmashev, soldier of the revolution.

# THE DEATH OF DOLGUSHOV

*By* Isaac Babel

The curtains of battle were approaching the town. At mid-day there flew past us Korotchaev in a black cloak—the disgraced natchdiv,* who fought alone and sought death. He shouted at me as he ran:

"Our communications are cut! Radzivillov and Brodi are in flames! . . . "

He galloped off—his cloak blown to the winds, all black, with eyes shining like coals.

On the plain, smooth as a board, the brigades were reforming. The sun rolled in the purple dust. The wounded partook of a light repast in the trenches. The nurses lay in the grass and sang in low voices. Afonka's scouts ran about the fields, searching for dead and equipment. Afonka passed within two paces of me on his horse and, without turning his head, said:

"They've given us a beating, sure enough! Twice two! There's a cushion waiting for the natchdiv, he'll be fired! The soldiers are in a mess about it. . . . "

The Poles approached the wood, three versts from us, and placed their machine-guns not far away. The bullets whizz and whine. Their wail grows until it becomes unbearable. The bullets fly at the earth and swarm in her, tremulous with impatience. Vitiagaitchenko, the colonel of the regiment, snoaring in the

* Commander of a division.

sun's down-going, cried in his sleep and awoke. He mounted his horse and galloped off towards the advance squadron. His face was crumpled and red-striped from uncomfortable sleep, and his pockets were full of plums.

"Son of a dog!" he said angrily and spat out the stones. "A nasty business! Timoshka, fling out the flag!"

"Are we advancing?" asked Timoshka, unfurling the standard, on which there was a star and some words about the Third International.

"We shall see," said Vitiagaitchenko, and suddenly cried savagely:—"Wenches, get on your horses! Go, call the men together, the squadrons!"

The trumpeters sounded the alarm. The squadrons formed into a column. A wounded man crept out of the trenches and, covering his face with his palm, said to Vitiagaitchenko:

"Taras Grigorievitch, I am a delegate. If we are to be left here. . . . "

"Never mind, you will beat them off . . . " muttered Vitiagaitchenko and pulled up his horse on his haunches.

"We have an idea, Taras Grigorievitch, that we'll not beat them off," said the wounded man, after him.

"Don't try any wheedling," replied Vitiagaitchenko, turning his head. "And don't be afraid. I shan't abandon you!" He urged on his horse.

Just then rang out the lamenting, womanish voice of my friend, Afonka Bida:

"Don't you start off the horses at a trot, Taras Grigorievitch. Five versts is a long run. How are you going to hew 'em down, when our horses are starved. . . . There's no use hurrying—you'll find enough time to pick your pears before Virgin Mary's day. . . . "

"March!" commanded Vitiagaitchenko, without raising his eyes.

The regiment marched away.

"If it's true about a cushion for the natchdiv," whispered Afonka, with restraint,—"if he is fired, then God help us!"

Tears ran down his cheeks. I looked at Afonka in unutterable astonishment. He whirled round like a top, snatched his hat, grunted, gave a whoop and galloped away.

Grischook with his stupid cart and I were now alone and until evening we wandered between fiery walls. The division staff had vanished. Alien detachments did not accept us. The Poles entered Brodi and were driven out by a counter-attack. We reached the town graveyard. A Polish scouting party jumped up from behind the graves and, aiming their rifles at us, began to fire. Grischook turned. His cart made a clamour with all its four wheels.

"Grischook!" I shouted through the whizzing and the wind.

"Mere pranks!" he answered sadly.

"We are lost!" I cried out, seized with perishing joy, "we are lost, father!"

"Why do women labour," he answered more sadly still,—"why bethrothals, marriages, why do godfathers dance at weddings? . . . "

A long rosy streak appeared in the sky and vanished. The Milky Way slipped in among the stars.

"It makes me laugh," said Grischook, in a voice full of woe, and pointed with his knout at a man sitting near the road,—"it makes me laugh, why do women labour. . . . "

The man sitting near the road was Dolgushov, the

telephone operator. His legs outspread, he stared at us fixedly.

"That's how I am," said Dolgushov when we had driven up to him, "it's my end. . . . D'you understand?"

"We understand," replied Grischook, stopping his horses.

"It's necessary to waste a bullet on me," said Dolgushov sternly.

He sat, leaning against a tree. His boots stuck upward, wide apart. Eyeing me intently, he cautiously raised his shirt. His stomach had been torn out, his intestines crawled on his knees, and his heart beats were visible.

"If the Polish gentry come along, they'll make a joke of it. Here are my documents, you'll write my mother, a line or two. . . . "

"No," I replied dully and gave spur to my horse.

Dolgushov let his hands drop to the earth and surveyed their blue palms incredulously.

"So you're running away?" he murmured, crawling. "Run then, reptile. . . . "

Sweat crawled down my body. The machine-guns rattled faster than before, with hysterical wilfulness. Enveloped in the nimbus of the sun's last glow, Afonka Bida galloped towards us.

"What kind of a fair is this?" he shouted merrily.

I pointed out Dolgushov to him and rode away.

They spoke briefly—I did not hear the words. Dolgushov handed his documents to the scout. Afonka hid them in his boots and shot Dolgushov through the mouth.

"Afonya," I said with a pitiful smile and rode up to the Cossack, "and I couldn't do it!"

"Go away!" he replied, growing pale. "I'll kill you! You, with your specs, you pity our brother as a cat a mouse. . . . "

I drew myself up.

I rode away at a walk, without turning, and feeling down my spine the coldness of death.

"Afonya," shouted Grischook from behind, "don't act the fool!"—and he caught Afonka by his hand.

"Cringing blood!" shouted Afonka. "He shan't get away from me! . . . "

Grischook caught up with me at the turning. Afonka was not with him. He had gone in the opposite direction.

"There you see, Grischook," I said. "Today I've lost Afonka, my very best friend. . . . "

Grischook brought out from under his seat a puckered apple.

"Eat it," he said to me,—"eat it, please!"

And I accepted this charity from Grischook and ate the apple in sadness and reverence.

VSEVOLOD IVANOV

No living Russian writer, not even excluding Maxim Gorky, has experienced such hardship and adventure as Vsevolod Ivanov. After two narrow escapes from death, he can say: "Since 1917, there has been one road for me, the road of death. And because I am still alive I rejoice." The spirit of these words lives in his work. In spite of all the horror in which his stories abound, you never feel that life is altogether hopeless. There is much bad in it, to be sure, but there is also some good; and in the midst of despair there is the human will—the will to live. It is not astonishing that Ivanov's work should be, for the most part, autobiographical; and certainly there can be no doubt that "When I Became a Fakir" is, in every sense, an authentic episode. The author himself states in his brief "Autobiography":

"At fourteen, I began to tramp about. For seven years I was by turns a printer, a sailor, a clown, and a fakir—'dervish Ben-Ali-Bey' I was called. I swallowed swords, stuck pins into myself, jumped over knives and torches. I roamed about Tomsk with a barrel-organ, performed in country fair tents, recited couplets at circuses, and at times was billed even as a wrestler."

Ivanov is only 34 years old now. The son of a wayward father and an illiterate Cossack mother. He spent his childhood years in a Siberian village school. In 1917 Ivanov began to take part in the Revolution, but though a Bolshevik his creative writing is refreshingly free from propaganda.

# WHEN I WAS A FAKIR

*By* Vsevolod Ivanov

When I left Doctor Voskresensky I felt weary in spirit. So intense was my weariness that it was as if I had grown grey in one morning. I thought, if the doctor would only give me a prescription, then I would willingly part with the only pair of trousers I possessed in order to buy cocaine. But to sell one's trousers for food and to sit well-fed but without trousers is stupid.

My landlady, who was short-sighted and had a snivelling nose, was bending over and reading slowly the announcement lying on the table:

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TOWN!

*Gala Performance*

Introducing the world-famous Fakir and Dervish

BEN — ALI — BEY!

"Where did you learn this?" she asked, ingeniously twisting her snivelling nose.

"In India," I replied gloomily.

What else could I have answered? I could scarcely tell her that instead of accepting three roubles for my folding-bed I had agreed to take from the old-clothes

man two swords which were stamped with the word "Hamburg." The swords resembled one another in every particular. But if you examined them closely, you found that one of them was solid, while the other folded into three sections and had three press-buttons in the hilt. The buttons were white, perhaps of ivory. If you pressed one button, the third blade disappeared. If you pressed the second—the following third vanished. And, finally, the whole triad hid within the hilt.

"Just think of the money you'll earn with this!" said the old-clothes man affably.

I was in great need of a pleasant word, a word of encouragement. And, for this reason, I answered myself rather than him:

"But surely swords alone are not enough!"

Then the old-clothes man added a tattered book, issued, as I now remember, by Kholmushin in Moscow: "A Manual of Black and White Magic, With a Supplement of Card Tricks."

"Here you'll find the very life for you, young man."

Indeed, the old man hadn't made at all a bad guess. A part of my life actually had its origin here.

My landlady suffered with stomach trouble, and the only light in the house was furnished by a small oil-lamp in the bath-room. It goes without saying that my little room was wholly without such a luxury. That night when she knocked on the bath-room door she heard the answer: "I'm not feeling well!" The fact is, I was taking advantage of the light to study my book of black magic.

In the morning I went to the People's Playhouse, where a troupe of actors consisting of five persons was giving presentations of the "Red Lantern," "Evgeny Onegin," and "Misfortune from Being Too Clever."

When I told Pudozhgorsky (the theatrical manager) that I could swallow swords he smiled askance.

"Swords, what's swords? Why, everybody knows it's German work. Now if you could only hypnotize the masses! Say, take an eye out of its socket and then replace it. Now that would fetch a crowd!"

"I haven't yet learned the eye trick," I replied, with a show of courage, "but I can quite painlessly stick women's steel hat pins into my arms, breast and cheeks, and then suspend three-pound weights on these same pins."

"Why didn't you say so before?"

"I haven't the pins."

"We'll get them for you. From our actresses. How in the world," he asked not without respect, "did you manage to get to the pins and yet can't do anything with the eyes?"—He sighed.—"Well, I suppose it's all a matter of science and time."

And that was how the landlady came to read the huge announcement. According to this announcement, I, an old, cunning Hindu, was prepared "to swallow burning hemp, swords, jump on knives and *pierce* the body *painlessly* with hat-pins, on which are suspended three-pound weights." It was further intended to include in the announcement that I would take white-hot irons in my bare hands, but I had not been able to make the test successfully. I read the directions in Kholmushin's "Black Magic." It was stated there that it was necessary to rub one's hands with the yolk of an egg, to smear them then with a paste and besprinkle with "one part of coarsely ground powder made from grindstone." And that was exactly what I did. Then I lightly heated the samovar tongs and touched the palms of my hands with them. There was an odour of

burning flesh in the room, and, in answer to my outcry, the landlady came running. I dipped my hand into curdled milk. Supporting her stomach with her lean hands, the landlady compassionately looked at me and at the spoiled curdled milk. I was hungry and I scornfully thought that only my obvious and sudden agony had impelled the landlady to sacrifice for me some curdled milk.

Once in three days I dined in the monastery which stood above green Tobol. There were green bells in the monastery, and well-fed blue pigeons, at the sight of which the cats and I licked our chops. I must add that in those days I wished to eat everything in sight or to exchange for something edible. The monk, who poured lenten soup into my wooden bowl, asked me:

"What's that? A splinter?"—and added affectionately:—"A carpenter by any chance?"

"It's the Italian gangrene," I replied, feeling my throat dry.

The monk's eyes glowed with sympathy. From pity and astonishment he gave me an extra slice of bread.

"I've been told that in Italy," he said with scorn and curiosity, "there are no wooden houses at all?"

"Absolutely," I confirmed his statement. "There is only stone and volcanic lava."

"That means," he asked with a slight show of fear, "there're no carpenters there?"

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Evsey, in the priestly service."

"A carpenter, are you?"

The monk looked pleased, and gave me another slice of bread. He lifted the ends of his cassock from the greasy bench.

"Surely, surely . . . I'm from Perm. All our pre-

lates there made their own cells! Wasn't Christ Himself a carpenter?"

Evsey bowed low to me, gave me another slice of bread, and quietly asked:

"Now, you're a reader of books, one can see. That's why you wear specs. Is it written anywhere whether Christ used a smoothing-plane or whether He used to trim with a plain axe?"

I made no answer, and after the meal Evsey asked me to follow him to the monastery gates, where the blind wailed and the fat doves flitted about.

"It's clear, young fellow," I thought, "you don't believe in God!"

I had my fill, I felt gay, the mysterious vocation of fakir had straightened my life. I often thought of India, and I was mentally preparing some introductory words to my experiments. All the same I did not wish to hurt the feelings of hospitable Evsey, who had apparently entered the monastery for no other reason than that Christ had also been a carpenter.

"Have you ever been to the theatre, father? To a performance, I mean?"

"I never had the chance."

"I'll give you a ticket, Evsey!"

"What are you going to do there?"

"I'll swallow fire and I'll stick pins into myself without pain. . . . "

Evsey recoiled. His grey ragged cassock immediately became lighter than his face. His small beard suddenly stood out sharply as if it had been newly clipped. His hands were light, yet he could not raise them in order to make a sign of the cross.

"S-satan! . . . " he hissed,—"you're trying to tempt me, you unbelieving Satan!"—Then he straightened out, throwing his arms forward, and said dully:—"I

don't see what use I am to you, but I'll find you out. Do you want to deprive me of God? I'll not give up God to you. You're subtle, Satan!"

He put out a light hand, and I placed an entrance ticket in it, and left.

No sooner the huge bills appeared on the bill-boards than in the rooms occupied by Pudozhgorsky there showed up a lot of decrepit women who desired to see me, the magician, wizard and conjurer. There arrived from the district treasury an official who, through an error, had a deficit of five hundred roubles and wanted to know if the money would be returned to him. Pudozhgorsky took a rouble from him and said that an answer in writing would be forthcoming on the morrow. Young women who wanted their fortunes told also appeared. A merchant came who wanted to know what sort of vodka they had in India, and if he would have time to get a bottle for his birthday. My heart beat as fast as my fame. And the tickets in the booking office beat hardly less fast.

Did the urchins who ran after their iron hoops realize that the morose man sitting on a cliff above their heads turning the leaves of "Magic" was that famous fakir whose lightning-bearing fame was agitating the heart of the small town with insatiable tremors?

It is hard nowadays to astonish us. We have become too sophisticated. The last time I witnessed astonishment was when black bread was again sold freely in the streets, and yet once more when an elephant from Bokhara was brought to Moscow. But even then the astonishment was of this sort: "What, elephants? In a year our elephant should bring another hundred elephants into the world. What is astonishing is what we shall do with them!"

There were different times then. The times are worse, and more ridiculous. I am now proud and arrogant and have also learned not to be astonished. I am not even impressed when I remember how I smeared my face with brown make-up, wound round my head a green turban smelling of roaches, donned red cotton trousers stuck into Caucasian boots. Pudozhgorsky, stammering and squinting an eye, boasted of the huge crowd. By the side of the make-up, on a clean plate, several huge hat-pins gleamed loathsomely. Here also, decorated with bows of faded ribbon still faintly redolent of heliotrope, lay the weights, the smallest being a pound, the largest three; and the German swords, and a torch, and benzine, and knives within a hoop, through which I should have to jump.

On the stage the orchestra of the Voluntary Fire Company was drinking vodka, and indulging in a snack consisting of baked eggs, and many fingers simultaneously were testing the instruments, mostly wind. It seemed to me that the musicians as well as I understood that nothing would come of our performance. Tomorrow everyone in town would be pointing a finger at me, the urchins with hoarse autumnal voices would shout: "Fakir-r—rotter-r! . . . " The urchins are amused that autumnal leaves are clinging to my somewhat ragged trousers; I am tired of this autumnal muddy lyricism; I want good fat soup with dough-balls, cigarettes "twenty for seven kopecks" and a coarse book with plenty of laughs in it at other people's expense.

The flutist, a man sufficiently drunk and shrewd, came in to me and, taking a heavy bell, struck with it three times. Pudozhgorsky was energetically trying to sell another dozen tickets.

The curtain, gnawed by mice and full of holes made by fingers of drama lovers, twitched nervously as it ascended. Pudozhgorsky, attired in a frock coat with a paper flower half of which, to the good-natured amusement of the public, had fallen on the floor, appeared on the stage, and while he was delivering his introductory speech he went on stamping on the flower, and this fact attracted attention to the fact that instead of patent leather shoes he was wearing rubber galoshes. I don't remember what Pudozhgorsky said and what they sang after his speech, nor how hot and stifling it was in the auditorium. I suffered no stage fright. I remember, with great precision, my intense desire not to fall over the slips. Why I entertained this fear, I don't know. Perhaps, it was due to the din of moving stage scenery still remaining in my ears.

"Are you ready?"

My introductory speech (I remember every word of it) began thus:

"Dear ladies and dear gentlemen! Before I begin my experiments, I must tell you where and when fakirs first appeared on earth. In very remote times there existed on earth a war-like nation—the Hindus. They had a custom: before accepting a young man for the army they subjected him to many tests and tortures. For example, they put over his head a bag full of live ants and, to the accompaniment of girls' singing, conducted him round the village. . . . "

I further said that there was neither magic nor mystery in my experiments, that it was wholly a matter of personal magnetism and power of will, inherited from the Hindus.

"Music, a march!" shouted Pudozhgorsky.

I showed the sword without the white buttons to rows of spectators; returning to the table, I began to

wipe my hands with the towel, which I then placed over the sword. I then took the sword with the buttons and, of course, without any trouble held up at the mouth the hilt with the three blades which had slipped within the hilt. Then I pressed the reverse side of the buttons, and the blades slid out again. After that I jumped through a wooden wheel edged with knives, the blades being placed at an angle away *from me*, so that if I had the mischance to graze any of the knives, which were not firmly fixed, it would have simply fallen out of the wheel without doing me any harm. But the jump was no complicated matter, it was only necessary to be stubborn and that one's body should learn from second to second to repeat the same movement. Later I was to jump through the same wheel as easily and as thoughtlessly as I put on my spectacles. As for swallowing fire . . . well, though it is difficult just now to obtain the book on magic,—and the Gosizdat* does concern itself with such a profitable business,—the truth is, I have no desire now to talk about magic.

I grew tired, and sweat appeared on my neck. I feared sweat above all. The muscles then slip under one's fingers, one feels like a fish. I straightened out and began to count how many people sat in the first row. I counted up to eighteen. How many men were there, and how many women? I tried to marry them off, grew more cheerful, and I stopped perspiring.

As a matter of fact, I had been on the stage once before. There was a circus in Pavlodar, and I had entered one of the wrestling contests as an amateur. My competitor threw me in five seconds, slapped my

* The State Press—which publishes most Russian books today.

buttocks and said: "Where are you poking your nose, you snot-face. Learn to stand on your legs first!"

Even now I haven't much love for the stage. Drunken musicians dinned "On the volcanoes of Manchuria." I was full of loathing for these thundering trumpets. The auditorium stank of roast meat and unfulfilled human desires. Huge heels dinned on wooden floors and I experienced the sensation as if the first pin I was on the point of sticking into my breast was being pushed in by these enormous heels.

I don't remember whether or not I had thought so at the time,—hardly likely. But I remember clearly: a fine salivating pain pierced my eyelids, the head of the pin bounced in my hands; I was about to tremble, when, glancing at these eighteen snouts in the first row, I dully and voluptuously, with the faith of those gazing at me in my will, pushed the pin even deeper into my body. "Only I mustn't pierce an artery," I went on ceaselessly repeating to myself, "Only I mustn't pierce an artery!" I watched the tiny rose tongue of steel slide out of my flesh and, gleaming a slight red, creep in further.

A portion of my breast, the size of a match-box in area, was pierced through and through.

I even felt a kind of pride and quickly seized another pin. My cheeks burned, and my mouth was parched, but I felt the need of making haste. Pudozhgorsky watched me from behind the wings in perplexity, and I understood that I had forgotten to smile. I then smiled bashfully. The audience clapped, and for an instant I thought that they had applauded my smile. . . . No, I already had the third pin in my breast, and I picked up a pound-weight to hang on the pin. And then an ancient, sempiternal pain struck my temples

and diffused itself in my brain. It seemed to me as if my breast had been torn away and the blood gushed. I did not at all feel the weight, but I felt as if a huge nail were piercing my ribs. I realized that I might perspire from the pain. And that must not happen, an infection might ensue. I began to count the people in the first row. I could not manage to see them all and at this moment, seizing a plate, I quickly pressed my teeth together and forgot about the smile—the changeless circus smile for which the dullards and the idiots have such sympathy, not understanding that the smile is a triumph over oneself and the sole reward of one's body, because when one smiles one truly feels happier.

And now, mocking myself, I, without a smile, but with impudent stubbornness and pride, began to stick pins into my body and to hang weights on them.

People in the audience cried:

"Enough! Enough! . . . "

Some woman or other, with fair hair, the wife of an official, fainted, and no one made an effort to carry her out.

Then I straightened. I smiled, as far as my pierced cheeks would allow, and descended the steps into the auditorium.

I walked past five rows, and in the sixth I espied the wedge-like beard of Evsey. His beard was wet with perspiration. His eyes, with their swollen lids, turned away from me. He made a gesture with his hands.

In the din of clapping palms I failed to hear what he said. I felt sick, and I felt that my mouth was full of blood.

For some reason I began by removing the lighter weights, and I drew out the pins which pierced the muscles of my arms. I repaired to the lavatory and

quickly spat into the towel. No, it had only seemed to me; there was no blood in my mouth.

"Does it hurt?" asked Pudozhgorsky, counting the cash in the drawer.

"Not much."

"It's a matter of habit. I too. . . . Ah, some scoundrel's worked off a counterfeit note on me. My wife said it's terribly painful to bear children."

He glanced above my head.

"Are you going to have a drink now, and then look up the girls? What do you think?"

Later, when Pudozhgorsky had counted out what had been agreed upon, Doctor Voskresensky made his appearance in the lavatory: he had an all-knowing, hairless face; he was a member of a society of amateurs in astronomy and was greatly interested in Saturn.

"Of course, you'll forgive me," he said. "You see, I had thought you were a drug-fiend. That's why I refused you a prescription for cocaine. Now that I see your suffering face I curse myself. Cocaine can assuage pain, and you are working without it."

"I've suffered no pain," said I, drinking my third glass of water. "Pain is only imaginary. It's all a matter of self-hypnosis. I wanted the cocaine for the disinfection of the steel. In any case, I managed to get it without you. . . . "

"It's possible to obtain anything in our town," the doctor answered with assurance. "Did I ever tell you the story about Saturn? . . . How without a telescope we . . . . "

"I'm busy," I said, rubbing my breast with iodine, unobserved, under a shawl. "But fire away!"

The all-knowing doctor sat down, and for an hour and a half recounted about Saturn. Pudozhgorsky was

writing an announcement about the next performance: "Many new numbers of the world-famous fakir and dervish . . . ," which accomplished, he hired a cabby and went to see the girls. It was necessary for me to ask the doctor for a prescription for cocaine, but I loathed his all-knowing physiognomy, his rubber collar and the long nail on his small finger; I knew that I would not ask him, and that again the steel pins, undisinfected by cocaine, would pierce my body. . . .

And I shared his reflection that it would be nice to spend one's time in the Pulkovsk observatory. . . .

At last, Doctor Voskresensky was convinced how much more clever he was than I. He began to be bored speaking to me.

The wooden hand-rails of the staircase, rough and smelling of damp, shook for the last time from the blows inflicted by the palms of the self-confident doctor.

And I knew that Evsey was waiting for me at the gates. Under the dim street lamp I was able to descry his cassock, the hems of which were bespattered with mud. He had already managed to change his attire—it followed that he was happier in the monastical garb.

"I understand thee," said Evsey, grasping me with a hot hand. "I understand thee through and through. I'll bring thee some oil to put on your wounds. Thou, brother . . . if thou hadst only believed in God, thou wouldst have been an apostle at least . . . I looked into thine eyes—and there's nothing satanic in thine eyes . . . I look—and I think: this life of ours is a stifling, sickly affair. And I grew sad, young man . . . I'll bring thee some healing oil for thy wounds."

I did not take his oil, but it came to pass that his soul was to be left in my hands. He was in the begin-

ning a carpenter who helped to build the structure for our show at the Slavgorod fair; then he went to Kulunda as a clown, then to the valley of Rok-Saya as a trick-rider and match-maker. The cheerful history of his marriage, which had occurred on the Semirechensk highway, I shall relate later.

# THE CHILD

*By* Vsevolod Ivanov

## 1.

Mongolia is a wild beast, and a gloomy one! Its stone is a wild beast, and its water is a wild beast; even its ladybird watches for an opportunity to bite.

No one knows the heart of the Mongolian—he walks about in skins, he looks like a Chinaman and, very remote from the Russians, across the desert of Nor-Koi, he has made his home. And, it is said, that he will go beyond China into India, into the unknown blue lands on the seven shores. . . .

Many Kirghis who had left Irtish during the Russian war and trekked to Mongolia had pitched their tents near the Russians. Their heart is well-known—it can be seen through and through. They wandered here in no undue haste—and they brought their beasts and their children, and even their sick.

The Russians were being driven hither without mercy—but then they were moujiks, and sturdy fellows. On the mountain stones they left their superfluous weakness—here one fellow died, there another was beaten to death. The families and the tools and the domestic beasts had been left to the Whites. The moujiks were malignant like wolves during the spring. They lay in their tents and thought about the steppe, about Irtish. . . .

There were about fifty of them. Sergey Selivanov

acted as their head, and the detachment was called: "The partisan detachment of the Red Guard of Comrade Selivanov."

They were bored.

While they were being driven across the mountains, their hearts had been in fear of the black stoniness over which they had to pass. They reached the steppe—and they found it tedious here; because the steppe was like their own Irtish steppe: there was sand, harsh grass, a hard-forged sky. Everything was alien, not one's own, and the land was unploughed and wild.

And it was hard without women.

At night they sat around and told soldiers' tales about women, and when it became unbearable they saddled their horses and caught Kirghis women in the steppe.

And the Kirghis women submitted to their Russian captors.

It was loathsome to take them, for they were still and never opened their tightly closed eyes. It was as if you had sinned with domestic cattle.

The Kirghis feared the moujiks, and would wander away further into the steppe. When they saw a Russian they threatened him with a rifle or with a sling; they raised whoops, but they did not shoot. Perhaps, they couldn't? . . .

2.

The paymaster of the detachment, Afanasy Petrovitch, was tearful, like an infant. And his face was like an infant's: it was small, hairless and rosy. But his legs were long and strong, like a camel's.

When he mounted a horse, he was forbidding. His face seemed hidden, and he sat there looking grey, angry and terrifying.

On Trinity day three men were ordered out into the steppe to find good meadows. They were Selivanov himself, paymaster Afanasy Petrovitch, and secretary Drevesinin.

The sand rose in the sun like a cloud of smoke.

From on high the wind blew. While from the earth, toward the tremulous sky, the warmth rose. The bodies of the men and the beasts were hard and heavy, like stones. It was tedious.

And Selivanov hoarsely said:

"What sort of meadows are there out there? . . ."

The others knew: he was speaking of Irtish. But the beardless faces were mute. It was as if the sun had burnt out their hair, as it burns out the grass in the steppe. Their narrow eyes, like wounds from a fish-hook, were inflamed red. It was hot.

Afanasy Petrovitch responded at last in a lamenting voice:

"Surely everything hasn't dried up there too?"

His slender voice was tearful, but there were no tears on his face. Only the horse under him, tired and panting, showed a trickle in its great long eyes.

Thus, one after the other, along paths traced by wild goats, the partisans rode into the steppe. . . .

The sand glowed hot, in endless monotony. A stifling wind blew. The sweat struggled within the body, unable to break through the dry skin. . . .

Towards evening, just as they were issuing out of a valley, Selivanov said, pointing to the west:

"Look! There are riders out there!"

It was true: on the remote horizon rosy clouds of sand could be seen.

"It must be Kirghis."

A dispute arose. Drevesinin said that the Kirghis

wandered afar and dared not approach Selivanov's camp. Afanasy Petrovitch said, it was certainly Kirghis. It was the sort of thick dust the Kirghis usually raised.

But when they got nearer to the dust, they all decided:

"Strangers . . . unknown folk. . . ."

From the voices of their riders the horses sniffed something strange in the air. They pricked up their ears, and fell to the earth long before the command. They lay there, in the hollows, these grey and yellow horses, still as corpses. They were helpless and laughable, with their legs as thin as poles. Was it from shame, then, they closed their large frightened eyes and breathed panting?

Selivanov and paymaster Afanasy Petrovitch lay beside their horses. The paymaster, his nose sniffing, was crying. To make it easier for him, Selivanov always placed him by his side, and from this childish crying the heavy moujik's heart felt almost cheered and incited to mischief.

The pathway was lost in the dust. The beat of wheels was audible. The long black manes of horses could be seen wavering in the dust.

Selivanov said with assurance:

"Russians. . . . Officers."

Two persons in hats with red bands were sitting in the new plaited waggon. Their faces were invisible through the dust. It was as if the red bands shimmered in a yellow cloud. The muzzle of a gun could be seen thrust upward each time a hand with a whip was flung out above the dust.

Drevesinin reflected and said:

"Officers . . . on business, of course. An expedition is on foot. . . . That's clear."

He winked an insolent eye, and added:

"We'll prescribe for them, won't we, Selivanchik?"

The waggon with its passengers firmly goes on. They have good horses. Merrily they go on, and behind them, as with a foxen tail, the waggon hides its traces under the falling Mongolian dust.

Afanasy Petrovitch drawled in his lachrymose way:

"It's not necessary, brothers. . . . Better put them in prison. . . . Wait before you must beat them."

"Aren't you sorry for your own head . . . d'you want a beating?"

Selivanov grew angry and snapped at him:

"It is not necessary to cry here, paymaster!"

What, above all, provoked them to anger was that the officers should have ventured to appear alone, without a convey. It was as if their strength were considered as nothing, as if death were to be meted out to the moujiks as a matter of course. At that moment one officer actually had risen to his height and was looking round the steppe; but it was hard for him to see: there was the dust; there was the evening wind on the red burned grass; there were the two stones by two hollows in the ground resembling corpses of horses. . . . What sort of stones were they? . . . Were these corpses? . . .

The waggon, the wheels, the passengers, their thoughts. . . . They ride on in the red dust.

The men in ambush fired their rifles. . . . They raised a whoop. Then again fired.

At the same moment the two hats, one hitting against the other, fell into the waggon.

The reins had suddenly been dropped. . . .

The horses tore forward . . . fell. There was white froth at their manes. . . . Their muscles trembling, they lowered their heads, and rose to their feet.

Afanasy Petrovitch said:

"They must be dead. . . ."

The moujiks walked up, looked in.

The two passengers with the red bands in their hats were dead. They were sitting shoulder to shoulder, their heads thrown back. One of the dead was a woman. Her hair had fallen apart; her military tunic outlined her high woman's breasts.

"It's odd," said Drevesinin. "She has herself to blame. She had no right to wear that hat. Who wants to kill a woman? . . . Women are necessary to society."

Afanasy Petrovitch spat.

"You're a monster and a boorjooy.[1] . . . There's nothing in your head . . . just trash. . . .

"Don't go so fast," Selivanov interrupted them. "We're not robbers, we must write it all down—it's all national property now. Give me some paper."

The first thing they saw among other articles of "national property" was a light-eyed, fair-haired infant, lying in a plaited Chinese basket. In his small hand he tightly clutched a corner of the brown blanket. A suckling, he was tiny and he squealed in a slender voice.

With much feeling, Afanasy Petrovitch said:

"So there . . . he's got to have his say . . . and all about it."

They took pity on the woman and did not deprive

[1] A bourgeois.

her of her clothes, but the man they buried naked in the sand.

3.

Afanasy Petrovitch journeyed back in the seized waggon, he held the infant in his arms and, rocking him, he sang quietly:

*The nightingale bird*
*Sings its sad song . . .*
*The canary bird*
*Too . . . how my heart's wrung. . . .*

He remembered the small village Lebiajy—his native home; the droves of cattle; his family; the little children—and he cried in subdued tones.

The infant also cried.

The heated sand, dry and friable, also seemed to cry subduedly, as the waggon ran over it. The partisans rode on their low, firm-fleshed Mongolian horses. Their faces were burning and their souls were burning.

Near the pathways stifled by the sun there were stretches of wormwood, resembling sand—very fine and almost invisible to the eye.

And the sand is wormwood, fine and bitter.

Oh, pathways, goat pathways! Oh, sands, bitter sands! Mongolia is a wild beast, and a gloomy one! . . .

* * *

They examined the officer's property. There were books, a box containing tobacco, and gleaming steel instruments. One of these was a small four-cornered brass case standing on three long legs and divided into several compartments.

The partisans examined the various objects, felt them with their hands, again and again tried their weight.

The moujiks smelt of sheep's fat—from sheer tedium they ate a great deal, and the fat had gotten on to their clothes. Big-cheek-boned and thin-lipped, they had come from a Cossack village on the Don; with long black hair and dark faces, they had known the lime mines. And they all had bow-legs and guttural steppe voices.

Afanasy Petrovitch lifted the brass-topped tripod and said:

"It's a tiliscope. . . ." And he half closed his eyes. "It's a good tiliscope, must cost more than a million. They've looked at the moon through it, fellows, and they've found gold sand on it. . . . It isn't necessary to wash it. . . . It pours like flour, and all of it the purest gold. All you've got to do is to pour it into a sack. . . ."

One of the others, who had lived in a town, roared with laughter.

"A cock and bull story. . . ."

Afanasy Petrovitch got angry.

"A cock and bull story, is it, you filthy carrion? . . . Just wait. . . ."

"Wait for whom?"

Afanasy Petrovitch seized a revolver.

"Sh-h!" Selivanov quieted them.

They shared the tobacco, and they handed over the instruments to Afanasy Petrovitch—as paymaster he would wait for an opportunity to give it in exchange for something from the Kirghis.

He placed the instruments before the infant.

"Here's something to play with. . . ."

The infant paid no attention to the offering. He was crying. Afanasy Petrovitch tried this and that, even worked himself into a sweat; but the infant, unappeased, went on whimpering.

The cooks brought in dinner. There was a thick odour of butter, of gruel, of cabbage-soup. Huge wooden spoons were drawn from the boot-legs. The grass had been stamped down by the campers. Higher up, on the cliffs, the sentinel shouted:

"Hurry up! . . . I want some grub. . . . Send up a fellow to take my place!"

They had their dinner, then remembered: the infant wanted food. He had not ceased crying.

Afanasy masticated a mouthful of bread. He thrust a bit of the wet bread into the open tiny mouth, to the accompaniment of:

"Pp-i-pi . . . little fellow . . . get it down, young 'un. . . . It's tasty."

But the infant turned away his head and shut his mouth—he simply wouldn't have any of it. He was whimpering through his nose, in low but piercing tones.

The moujiks came up, surrounding them. Heads looked above heads at the infant. All were silent.

It was hot. The cheeks and the lips looked greasy from the mutton they had eaten. The shirts were open. The feet were bare, yellow—like the Mongolian soil.

One of the moujiks proposed:

"Try the cabbage soup on him. . . ."

They cooled the soup. Afanasy Petrovitch dipped a finger into it and stuck it into the infant's mouth. The good fat cabbage-soup ran down from his lips on to his little rose-coloured shirt and baize blanket.

He refused it. He went on whimpering.

"A puppy is more clever—he'll eat off your finger. . . ."

"One's a dog, the other a human being. . . ."

"Thinkin' won't help here! . . ."

There was no cows' milk in the camp. They thought of feeding the infant on mare's milk. That too was impossible. The child might die.

The moujiks scattered among their carts. Disturbed, they talked it over in groups. Afanasy Petrovitch wandered among the carts, a torn under-tunic over his shoulders, his small eyes also looking ragged. His voice was thin, perturbed, like a child's; it was as if the infant himself were running about, complaining.

"What's to come of it? . . . What's the way out, moujiks? . . . There must be a way out, eh? . . . Can't you think up something, you sons of dogs? . . ."

They stood about, these broad-shouldered, mighty fellows, and looked helpless.

"It's a woman's business. . . ."

"To be sure. . . ."

"From a woman's hands he would have eaten a whole sheep. . . ."

"That's how it is."

Selivanov collected a crowd and announced:

"It's impossible to let the little Christian fellow die like a beast. Let's say, the father was a boorjoy, but the baby—what about him? He's not to blame."

The moujiks agreed.

"It's nothing to do with the child. He's innocent."

Drevesinin broke into a loud laugh:

"Let the child grow up! He'll grow up with us—and he'll fly up to the moon. . . . To pick up the golden dust. . . ."

The moujiks did not laugh. Afanasy Petrovitch raised a fist and shouted:

"You're an ignorant dog—that's what you are! The only one in camp that makes mock!"

He stamped his feet, waved his arms, then suddenly raised the piercing cry:

"A cow. . . . A cow is what we want for him!"

They responded in one voice:

"Without a cow it means death. . . ."

"We must have a cow. . . ."

"Without a cow he'll die!"

Afanasy Petrovitch said with decision:

"Fellows, I intend going for a cow. . . ."

Drevesinin insolently interrupted him:

"Are you going to Irtish, to the Lebiajy village? . . ."

"It's no good my going to Irtish, unspeakable monster! I'm going to the Kirghis!"

"You'll exchange the tiliscope for a cow, I s'pose! Go, then, benefactor!"

Afanasy Petrovitch turned on him and cried savagely:

"You carrion! D'you want to smell my fist?"

The chairman of the gathering, Selivanov, called for order:

"Enough!"

A vote was taken. It was decided that Drevesinin, Afanasy Petrovitch and three others should mount their horses and go to a Kirghis village, in the steppe, and drive back a cow. With luck, they might bring two or five cows, as the cooks were complaining that their meat supply was becoming exhausted.

They attached rifles to their saddles, and donned

caps of fox fur, so as to give the appearance at a distance of being Kirghis.

They wound the blanket around the baby and put it in the shadow under a cart. A young moujik sat at his side, and for his own amusement and the baby's fired intermittently into a bush of wormwood.

4.

Oh, sands,—joyless, Mongolian! Oh, stone—blue, unhappy! The hands here are deep in the soil, evil!

The Russians ride on the sands. It is night.

The sands smell of heat, of wormwood.

The dogs in the acolas* bark at the wolf, at the darkness.

The wolves howl in the darkness, at hunger, at death.

The Kirghis ran to escape death.

Will the droves of cattle escape death?

* * *

The Kirghis village smelt of sour milk. Lean and hungry children sat by bonfires. Near them were several bare-ribbed, sharp-muzzled dogs. The tents looked like hay-ricks. Beyond the tents was a lake and rushes. Suddenly, shots rang out, from the rushes, aimed at the bonfires. There were cries: "O-o-a-at! . . ."

The Kirghis all at once rushed from their felt huts. They raised cries of fear. They sprang on their horses. The horses were kept bridled day and night. They trampled on their tents. They trampled on the steppe. Wild cries came from the rushes:

"Ai-ai, the Reds—the Whites—Russians—ai-ai . . ."

*Kirghis villages.

One grey-bearded fellow fell from his horse, his head landing in the huge boiling kettle, which was upset. Scalded, he whimpered in a thick voice. Its tail between its legs, a hungry, shaggy dog cautiously dipped its muzzle into the hot milk.

The mares neighed shrilly. Frightened, as if they were threatened by wolves, the sheep in the fold were panicky. The cows panted.

The Kirghis women, seeing the Russians, humbly submitted to them.

Drevesinin laughed lewdly:

"We are stallions, then, are we? . . . We shan't always. . . ."

Quickly filling his flat Austrian flask with milk and, cracking his whip, he drove some cows and calves towards a tent. The calves, loosed from their leash, made at once for the cows' udders, and joyously, with their large soft lips, seized the teats.

"They look mighty hungry, I say. . . ."

And Drevesinin fired his revolver at the calves.

Afanasy Petrovitch made a circuit of the village and was about to follow Drevesinin on his horse, when he suddenly remembered:

"Why, we must have a sucking-bottle. The deuce take it, we've almost forgotten it!"

He rushed in and out of the tents in search of a sucking-bottle. The fires in the tents were almost extinguished. Afanasy Petrovitch seized a firebrand and, flourishing it so that the sparks flew, and coughing from the smoke, he searched for a sucking-bottle. In one hand the firebrand crackled, in the other he held a revolver. He could find no sucking-bottle. The submissive Kirghis women sprawled about on their beds of felt. The children were bawling.

Afanasy Petrovitch grew angry and, in one tent, he shouted at a young Kirghis woman:

"A sucking-bottle, you good-for-nothing, I want a sucking-bottle!"

The Kirghis woman wept and began to undo her silk caftan. . . . At her side cried an infant, wrapped in rags.

At that moment Afanasy Petrovitch seized her breast and pressed it. He whistled and cried joyously:

"Woh. . . . A sucking-bottle! Ah, a good one! . . . Don't make that noise! It's a good one!"

And he seized the woman by the hand and dragged her after him.

In the darkness he placed the woman in the saddle, and from time to time he felt her breast until he brought her to Selivanov's camp.

"I've found what I wanted," he said, overjoyed, and there were tears in his eyes. "When I say I'll find a thing, I'll find it if I have to dig in the earth for it."

## 5.

Once in camp, Afanasy Petrovitch discovered that, in the darkness, the Kirghis woman had managed to bring her own child with her.

"Never mind," the moujiks said. "There'll be enough milk for both. "There are cows, and she's a healthy wench."

The Kirghis woman was taciturn and strict, and she fed the infants when no one was looking on. The two of them lay on the felt bed in the tent—one of them all white, the other a little yellow fellow—and they whimpered in one voice.

In the course of a week, at the common gathering, Afanasy Petrovitch complained:

"Comrades, I don't like this hiding game. The Kirghis woman is cheating us. She's giving all her milk to her own. As for ours, she sometimes lets him have a drop or two. Brothers, I know, for I've peeped. Just have a look for yourselves. . . ."

The moujiks went and looked. The infants were like all infants. One was a little white fellow, the other a yellow, like a ripe melon. But it was clearly to be seen that the Russian was meagre compared to the Kirghis.

Afanasy Petrovitch gesticulated with his hands.

"I've given him a name—Vaska. . . . But when you take a look at him. . . . Cheating, I call it!"

Then spoke Drevesinin, without his usual smile:

"Oh, you Vaska, you look as if you had a foot in the other world. . . ."

They found a stick, and they arranged it on a waggon shaft to make sure that one half did not outweigh the other.

They suspended the infants, one at either end, to see which outweighed the other.

The infants tied in hanging rags whimpered. The faint odour of babies came from them. The Kirghis woman was standing near the waggon and, understanding nothing, was crying.

The moujiks were silently looking on.

"Let it go!" said Selivanov. "We'll see what the scales say!"

Afanasy Petrovich removed his hands from the stick, and immediately the Russian youngster rose high.

"Oh, you yellow-mouthed wretch!" said Afanasy Petrovitch wrathfully.

He lifted a sheep's skull lying on the ground and placed it on the Russian child's side of the scales. The two infants were then even.

The moujiks raised a din.

"She had overfed her own by a whole sheep's head, eh?"

"No one's watched her!"

"What a beast! Not to have fed ours!"

"Who's watched her?"

"There're other things to do besides watching her!"

A few of the more sedate moujiks confirmed this view:

"How's one to watch her!"

"Besides—she's the other babe's mother. . . ."

Afanasy Petrovitch stamped his feet, and shouted:

"I s'pose you think a Russian human being must perish for some sort of foreign trash. . . . Is my Vaska to perish then? . . ."

They looked at Vaska. He was lying there, looking pale and meagre.

The moujiks felt perturbed.

Said Selivanov to Afanasy Petrovitch:

"Why don't you get rid of him . . . of the other, I mean. God be with him, let him die . . . the little Kirghis fellow. We've beat up a lot of them. And what's one more or less to answer for?"

The moujiks gave a look at Vaska and, without another word, went their ways.

Afanasy Petrovitch took the little Kirghis and put him into a torn sack.

The mother began to weep. Afanasy Petrovitch hit her lightly on her jaw and went to the steppe.

6.

Two days later the moujiks stood on their tip-toes near the tent and, looking over each other's shoulder, peeped inside, where on the felt bed the Kirghis woman was feeding the white child.

The woman had a submissive face with narrow eyes, like seeds of oats; she wore her purple silk caftan and boots of morocco leather.

The infant had his face snuggled against her breast, and he played with his hands on the caftan, while his legs pranced about with ridiculous awkwardness.

The moujiks looked on and laughed uproariously.

And more tender than anyone else was Afanasy Petrovitch. Sniffing, he said in a tearful voice:

"Ain't he a fine youngster!"

Beyond the linen tent there ran, no one knew whither: dales, cliffs, the steppe, alien Mongolia.

No one knew whither ran Mongolia—a wild beast, and a gloomy one.

S. SERGEEV-TZENSKY

A lately published Guide to Russian literature of the past generation, which supplies many facts of interest about living writers, great and small, has opposite S. Sergeev-Tzensky's name merely the words, "Born in 1876," and this brief statement is followed by a considerable bibliography. The meagreness of the entry is, undoubtedly, due to the reticence of the author himself. In a country where almost every author supplies an "autobiography" "on request" astonishingly little is known about Sergeev-Tzensky. Gorky, who has met nearly every Russian writer worth his salt, has not only never met Sergeev-Tzensky but has actually never seen his photograph. Yet Gorky has declared that Sergeev-Tzensky's novel, "Transfiguration" (the first volume of which is available in English) is one of the two greatest Russian novels produced during this century.

The author began his literary career in 1904, but after a decade of literary activity became silent. Here reappeared again in 1923, when the first part of his "Transfiguration" was published. During the Revolution he pastured cows in Crimea, and he has always lived apart from his literary contemporaries. But he has always mingled with the people, and his knowledge of dialects is remarkable. He is a considerable stylist, and as a master of dialogue descriptive of character he is almost without an equal.

# THE MAN YOU COULDN'T KILL

*By* S. Sergeev-Tzensky

One man beats another with none too great assurance. He may even entertain a fear that the other, whom he is beating, should suddenly play a trick on him.

He beats his victim with the bigger half of his being, while the smaller observes and weighs the act.

The smaller whispers: "Enough!" The bigger goes on beating. The smaller says unmistakably: "It's folly! Stop it!" The bigger goes on beating, but more weakly, with some restraint. The smaller, at last, commands: "Stop it, I tell you!"—and in an instant takes the place of the bigger. The man who did the beating walks away, outwardly righteous and indignant, but is inwardly sometimes even ashamed.

Not so the crowd. Delicate feelings are unknown to it. When a crowd shouts, it does not shout but judges; does not discuss but pronounces; does not beat but punishes, and anyone whom the crowd has beaten knows he will not rise again.

And Feodor—Feodor Titkov, from the Cossacks' village, Ouriupinskaya—knew this. He was of low stature and inconspicuous, but compact of body and with bright red face, still young and slenderish, his small eyes not set into eyes' hollows but resting, as it were, on the immediate surface of his angular cheeks.

But he saw, as did another comrade, Manolati, a Bessarabian gypsy, whose dark face was marked with white scars; and a third, a cobbler from Akhtirka,

named Karavanchenko, otherwise comrade Semyon, a lugubrious fellow with caved-in chest, loud voice and eyes which shone.

When they were seized in the village and their arms bound, they were asked curtly:

"Bolsheviks?"

They replied with equal curtness:

"Bolsheviks."

And Manolati, only stretching out his neck, added vehemently:

"Never mind! Just wait and see. We'll be on top yet!"

Then they were led to a well with a very high crane on it, and no one shouted nor mocked at them; only a thick dust rose from heavy boots, and someone sneezed, or coughed, or spat. Now Cossack women appeared on either side, standing by their homes, and scampering small boys.

Just before he had been caught here at work, Titkov had been eating a herring, and hadn't had time to quench his thirst; then, with his comrades, he was locked for the night in a barn.

The day had been very hot and he craved water. As he approached the well, he felt with his whole compact, swollen body that he was being led precisely where he needed to be led, and his eyes sought the pail.

The pail was large enough to be a tub, and stood, as it happened, with its wet-gleaming chain, on the well shelf and he could not take his eyes from it.

They were near it now: it was full to the brim. Someone had just given his horse a drink and had refilled the pail, but the horse wouldn't drink any more.

Around the well the sand was damp: there was a smell of cattle. A gad-fly settled on Titkov's cheek; he

got rid of it by wiping his face against his left shoulder, never once removing his gaze from the pail. When they had come to a halt, he said, without pleading, but simply yet audibly:

"Comrades, let us have a drink!"

To this the Cossack nearest to him, a red-bearded fellow with blue veins on his nose and wet locks showing under his cap, responded no less simply:

"Drink to your content!"—and vigorously struck him across the cheek from which the gad-fly had just been brushed off.

And at the same moment he saw that they had knocked down comrade Semyon, whose feet, in the upset, kicked his own; and it seemed to him that Manolati's dark head flew upward, above the other heads, as if it actually flew; and just as he observed this, something struck him on the back of his head and brought him to his knees, and he murmured distinctly:

"So this is the end of us!"

And he drew in his head into his shoulders, like a turtle, and stretched out his legs. He lay flat, upon his face; he felt the wet sand upon his lips, and it smelt strongly of the water of horses.

He tried to work his hands round under him, but they were bound tight and the rope resisted his most desperate efforts.

They kept beating him, except for brief interjections, in silence: and did it in earnest, as if they were killing a pig.

At first Titkov was able to tell where it hurt him most: afterwards, it pained equally, no matter where they struck. He merely gritted his teeth and swallowed spittle.

The shrill outcries of Semyon could no longer be

heard. Titkov thought: "They've killed him!" and drew his head in further. But Manolati still managed to make himself heard. Again and again he cried:

"Ours! They'll be on top yet! They will! . . . They will! . . . On top! . . ."

Titkov had time to think about him: "He's a tough one. . . . He'll have to get it a hundred times! . . ."

Then, suddenly, he was hit on his right arm, so hard, the pain went to his head, and was hit again on the head, so he ceased to hear Manolati and everything else.

* * *

The cold woke him.

He was wet from head to foot.

He could not at once recall what had happened to him: then remembered the well, and the Cossacks, and how they had beaten him. He thought: "They have thrown me into the well!" But quickly corrected himself: "Why soil the well? It would have to be cleaned out afterwards. . . ."

And, opening the eye which was higher above the ground than the other, he saw the wet tawny point of a boot almost at his very nose, and understood someone's quite good-natured words:

"Eheh! . . . This devil's still alive!"

Then he heard another voice:

"The gypsy, too, is stirring!"

He scarcely had time to think that men had come to their rescue when the boot, with a hard crack, struck him just under his eyes.

Again he lowered his face and drew in his head.

"On top!" came the stertorous sound somewhere near Manolati.

Then they began to hammer with their boots, and someone heavy sprang on his back and jumped up and down.

Titkov tightened his stomach, but the iron-shod heels with their sharp points tore the skin from his arms. . . . At last, the other arm, as yet unhurt, cracked above the wrist under the onslaught.

Titkov was in the act of moistening his lips with his tongue when he ceased to feel.

Once more they poured ice-cold well-water on his body. Again he opened one eye—the other was filled and would not open—and again he saw the huge wet point of the boot.

They turned him over. Someone's beard, as it were a paternal one, bent over him, and he murmured into it:

"A drink! . . ."

Then, simultaneously, a deafening concord of voices:—

"Alive! . . . The devil himself! . . . The gypsy, and the other, have pegged out, but this one's still alive! . . ."

He lay thus for a few moments and saw above him fragments of beards, and red noses, and, as if the men were not at all the ones who had been trying to beat him to death, he again whispered:

"A drink . . . brothers!"

Then, above his eye, a fish flashed out and broke his teeth.

Someone asked, with astonishment and not a little distress:

"Where did he get it all? The strength of an anathema! Whew!"

And no matter how Titkov braced his stomach, he felt the full force of the iron-shod boot.

Five minutes later the three bodies near the well were motionless.

The Cossacks washed, coughed intermittently, and blew their noses, as they did in the morning after sleep; one even wetted his hair and drew a small metal comb through it.

Cossack women with infants in their arms approached to have a look. The sun was inclining toward mid-day when a cart drove up. The three bodies were dumped into it and were borne four versts from the village—towards a ravine.

Two young Cossacks walked beside the cart. Their shouldered rifles gleamed in the sun.

They never left the village without their rifles, even a small matter of four versts. It was a turbulent time—the 'eighteenth year.

And it so happened that when Titkov, lying uppermost of the others, opened his eye, he was blinded instantly by the gleam of the rifles at the backs of the Cossacks walking side by side.

Cossacks and rifles—he remembered them afterward—he had seen them before, but the gleam seemed extraordinary, had something unearthly about it. . . .

And the pain, all at once, went through his whole frame: his throat, and every organ in his body burned unbearably.

He had come to himself just as the horses were approaching the ravine, and once more tried to recover his memory, to find out what was the matter with him, where he was, and why he felt pain everywhere, when he heard one Cossack say to the other:

"Here's a nice slope. . . . They'll fly like jackdaws. . . ."

And the second voice said:

"Here, of course! The very place. . . ."

Titkov could make neither head nor tail of this. And when, all wet, he was being dragged from the cart by four hands, amidst curses, he groaned with his whole broken body, and looked with his single eye, so that the four superstitious hands perceptibly relaxed, and as he struck the earth he groaned even louder.

Then the horses snorted and moved their heads about, and the pair with the rifles sprang back twenty paces. . . .

He listened, and heard one of the Cossacks, after prolonged cursing, add:

"And you, unholy power, when will you give up your accursed breath?"

And when Titkov looked again, he saw how the other snatched his rifle off his back, aimed and fired. . . .

Titkov trembled as he lay. It was as if someone had driven a huge nail into his breast. . . . And here, a jot higher, another nail was driven in: a bullet fired by the second Cossack.

His mouth opened to let the blood out; twice he jerked his head, then grew quiet.

The Cossacks dragged the stiffened body of Semyon, with its broken head, toward the chasm, and, swinging it first by the feet and shoulders, flung it down in silence. The corpse of the gypsy Manolati, with its head to one side, they threw after it, with the remark:

"Well, that's where your 'On top' will be!"

As for Titkov's body, when they had dragged it to the edge of the ravine, they paused:

"Suppose, suddenly, this devil . . ." began one.

"D'you think he's alive?" said the other.

They even pulled up his wet shirt to see where

the bullets were. But when they saw the whole body blue with bruises, and that the bullets had pierced the right breast, they merely shook the tufts of hair at the edge of their caps and pushed him down genially and watched the body turning somersaults, now catching vegetation by the feet, now by the head, until, at last, it lay at the bottom of the slope beside the first bodies.

* * *

Evening was coming on. The sun was no longer shining in the valley. There were shadows and coolness.

Three women from a neighbouring farm descended into the ravine for wood. At the bottom, and here and there on the slopes, there were bushes hacked down each year, and not the less persistent in growing again. And the women brought with them knives and rope.

When they stumbled on the corpses, they fled in fright. They looked behind and paused. Each pushed the other forward until again they confronted the bodies.

They gazed, shook their heads, and held the ends of their head-kerchiefs against their eyes.

"They must stink by this time?" asked one, doubtfully.

"They look fresh, I think," said the second, feeling her nose.

"An' yesterday I was rummaging here, my dears—them wasn't here then!" said the third, clasping her hands. "What kind o' scoundrels did it to them?"

Corpses should lie quiet. It is terrifying when a corpse tries to lift its head. It is enough to frighten anyone.

And when, slightly opening an eye, Titkov's head weakly turned, the women groaned and screamed all together, and the place was full of gleaming white ankles and running feet.

Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed when, one encouraging the other, the women returned for the third time, and heard the whisper:

"Little women, a drink, please. . . ."

A tiny spring had broken a way through the ravine two hundred paces below. The women knew this, but they had neither jugs nor cups, only knives and rope.

They suddenly noticed a blood-stained cap on the slope. It had fallen off Semyon Karavanchenko when his body had been flung down. They washed it as best they could and brought water to Titkov, and, bending over him, with the cap full of water in their hands, they thirstily watched as he thirstily drank it.

He drank the whole contents of the cap and, breathing with difficulty, glanced from woman to woman.

"My poor man, what kind of villains beat you like this?" one of the women asked, but in a whisper, which came as it were from his vitals, he responded:

"My dears . . . mayn't I have a little more water?"

* * *

It had grown dark when the women, at last, lifted him and bore him from the ravine.

Several times they paused wearily, while he again lost consciousness, and they said one to the other, reproachfully:

"What was the good of disturbing the poor soul? . . . Better had he died there, in the night. He'll only suffer now. . . ."

Nevertheless, they dragged him out, unbound his hands, and took him to the hospital in town, some twelve versts away.

And all, during the journey, went on reproaching one another. They said it would have been better if they had let him alone, if they had not brought him water, if they had left him to die back there in the ravine. They said they would never get him to the hospital alive, and that it was all for nothing. They'd only lose their sleep, and tire out their horse.

If they comforted themselves at all, it was that there were but few moujiks left on the farm, and their households were without any, and they could do as they pleased: it pleased them to be taking this man to the hospital, that was all there was to it . . . they'd take him there. . . . Let him die in the hospital if he must: there was something good in that, he'd at least have a proper burial.

To the questions asked them in the hospital: "Who is he?" and "Who beat him up?" the women answered:

"An' how should we know? . . . We found him like that . . . in the ravine. . . ."

"What's the good of bringing him here?" they said. "It's all the same, he'll die in the end!"

"If he dies, we'll fetch a wreath to put on his grave," said the women. "We've got to hurry home now, and be there by morning. There are cows to feed. . . ."

The women returned home in time, just as the first light showed in the sky. That morning the physicians in the hospital sought and marked off Titkov's broken ribs with the same dispassionateness with which the ribs had been broken in the village, by the well.

2.

A month had passed.

It was a holiday—there was little to do.

The three women from the farm journeyed to town, bringing with them a wreath of simple country flowers to put on the grave of the man whose thirst they had quenched and whom they had rescued from the ravine.

Much had happened during the month, and everyone knew all about the corpses and how they came to be in the ravine.

It was a summer day, and the women, having started at luncheon time, thought to return in the evening. They had no business of any kind in town. Their one thought was to pay a visit to the grave, place the wreath there, and return home.

They harnessed a pair of horses, both well-fed beasts.

And while the hoofs and the wheels sounded their measured pace along the little frequented road, the women recalled how but a month before they had covered the same ground with the man in their cart.

"Did anyone ever carry in a cart such a cripple?" said the eldest, who was about forty years of age and was called Lukerya and had faded eyes. "That shaking-up was enough to be the end of him!"

"Yes, pulling at the reins, it was all I could do to keep my eyes off him, lying there so pitiful-like . . ." said Aksinya, who was somewhat younger and had dark arched eyebrows.

"An' he lying there with his head on my knees all the time, and me never moving for fear of disturbing him, though my legs did ache . . ." said Likonida, the youngest of all, grief in her grey eyes. "If we just knew his name!"

Thus rode the women with the wreath, and on their sides there stretched first the Cossack fields, then the peasant fields. The boundary of the district lay not far from the farm; they were across the frontier of another province.

Hordes of men had not long since passed over these fields and in places had trod the wheat down. The women observed these traces of indifferently treading feet.

The sun, however, shone friendly, and the earth, like a warm body, exhaled odours comprehensible to the women—was not the earth like a woman's body?

A hawk circled overhead, a mere dot in the blue. A cuckoo sounded its note in the ravine. Flies settled on the horses, who vigorously switched their tails, but could effect nothing and had to depend on the reins to drive the flies off.

There had been a fire on one of the farms. The women knew of this, they had seen the flames a week before; and now, fastening their eyes on the spot where some charred cottages and barns were standing:

"Cattle must have been lost, too!" said Aksinya, holding the reins.

"How long do you think it will keep up?" said Lukerya, arranging the straw under her.

Likonida, who was holding the wreath, tore off a leaf that seemed to her superfluous, held it between her lips; then, throwing it on the road, said sadly:

"Fool-ish, fool-ish women. . . . What's the good of going? Why go?"

But the belfries of the town were already appearing from behind the dark green of the gardens, and the other two said:

"It's all the same now—it won't take long."

As it happened, in approaching the hospital they had to pass the graveyard, which lay to the right of the road. And the women said one to the other:

"If we just knew his name! You'd get down and ask the watchman. He's obliged to know the names of the dead."

They stopped the horses, but found no one they could ask.

* * *

They drove on, and at two o'clock reached the hospital.

They left the horses at the gate after giving them hay. For fear someone passing by would steal the wreath, grey-eyed Likonida took it with her. And thus the trio, carrying it, marched across the hospital courtyard, to ask where they should find the grave of him they had brought a month before, and what his name was.

Simple people remember their illnesses and the illnesses of those near them during holidays—never on workadays. And now amid the bustle in the hospital courtyard, with grass between the cobbles, the three women with the wreath wandered, not knowing of whom to ask what they wanted to know.

They ran into a stocky figure in an apron, and asked him, but he only grunted angrily:

"Can't you see? I am the cook."

They met another, this time a bareheaded man, also in an apron, carrying an ill-smelling pail. He listened to them, then said that he hadn't been long here, and went off at a trot.

They turned to a woman, all in white with a red cross, and she answered by asking:

"And what's his name?"

"An' how should we know, my dear?" said the women, in astonishment.

"If you don't know, what's the good of looking?"

And she hurried away from them on her high heels.

Then they stopped an old woman, who chanced to be the matron. She did not know, but conducted them to the assistant-surgeon, a red-moustached, beardless man, in a white smock.

He greatly astonished them.

"You say he died a month ago? . . . It sounds simple, but to say a month ago! It'll take a little searching. You couldn't count them. . . . Do you know what it's like now? Do you know how many people die here? You can't imagine it!"

"But you see, this man of ours—he was killed," they tried to jog his memory. But the assistant-surgeon, staring at them, said:

"Everybody's killed nowadays. . . . There's no such a thing as a live man."

In any case, they'd look up the books.

The women looked to their horses, who were standing where they had left them, munching their hay. They made a complete circuit of the courtyard, glanced into the laundry, into the kitchen, into the cesspool (Likonida holding on to the wreath), and walked into the garden to sit in the cool for a while, until the assistant-surgeon should find in the books what they wanted to know.

The garden was small; it had but two narrow pathways. There were a few patients sitting on forms painted yellow. They were in white—dressed all alike; only their caps were their own. One lay on a folding stretcher and read a newspaper—they looked at him

critically—while another sat in a wheel-chair and gazed high at the foliage; his arms were bandaged, and his head was also bound in white. . . . Two patients had relatives sitting with them; near one of them a tiny girl sucked at a sweet in a rose paper.

Timidly, holding to one another, the women went along one of the paths, staring hard with country eyes: such were the patients, such was the three-flounced frock worn by one woman, such were the brown stockings worn by the little girl. . . .

They walked past the man who was reading the newspaper. They studied him attentively, each for herself noting his thin fingers—like straws, they thought—however did he manage to hold the paper with them! —what keen eyes he had. . . . Then they walked past the one in the chair, and they scrutinized him as well. His eyes were sunken and large, and his arms supported from the neck by a sling . . . and they noticed another thing, that the wheel-chair was in the full sun, and they thought it might better have been in the shade. . . . And they went farther.

It was impossible to go very far in this small garden. They had come to the green fence, and so they retraced their steps along the same path, past the little girl with the sweet, past the stretcher, past the wheel-chair.

They pushed back their kerchiefs on their heads to allow coolness to reach them, while Likonida bore the wreath over the crook of her elbow, like a basket. As they approached the wheel-chair, it occurred to her to look at the flowers and say regretfully:

"See, they've withered, dragging 'em about. . . . "

The patient with the white swathe around his head, and his arms bandaged as far as the neck, darted a perturbed look at them suddenly, and said in a low voice:

"My d-dears. . . . Is it you . . . ?"

And the women stopped short.

"It's you—yes! my dears! . . . " he repeated with an uncommon joy, all radiant.

"It's our man! . . . Our man! In God's truth, ours! . . . " the women cried it loud enough for everyone in the garden to hear. "Our very own! . . . And we, with a wreath for your grave. . . . Look, it's he! . . . come to life again! . . . "

It was so unlooked-for, so marvellous, so exquisite, it transported their very souls, and unable to do otherwise, they fell each after the other on their knees by the wheel-chair, full of prayer and praise.

BORIS PILNIAK

Born in Mozhaisk, in the Moscow Government, in 1894, Boris Pilniak has German, Slavonic, Jewish and Mongolian blood in his veins. He was very precocious and began to write at nine. Something of his was published when he was fourteen. During the Revolution he travelled extensively through Russia. In 1922 he visited Germany and in 1923 England. "These journeys abroad have taught me a great deal," he says somewhere, to the great annoyance of some zealous Bolshevik critics who seem to think that they had taught him entirely too much. Indeed, they are finding fault with him for a number of things. For one thing, they say he has seen "the beast in man"; hence the beast in the Bolshevik. "Men-wolves, how many of them, together with real wolves, crowd the pages of Pilniak!"

His first important novel, "Bare Year," created quite a sensation when it first appeared in 1922. Pilniak has written some fine prose, in spite of certain idiosyncrasies of style and a tendency to vagueness. Young as he is, Pilniak has already influenced other writers.

# THE HUMAN WIND

*By* Boris Pilniak

## 1.

Ten years of human life—one has but to glance back on a decade—it is as if it happened yesterday: one recalls everything to the pettiest detail, to the tiniest wrinkle under the eyes, to the aroma in the room. But every ten years one fifth of all the living on earth depart from this life, tens of millions of human beings depart to rot in the earth, to feed the worms. Again, during these same ten years millions of human beings come into life; they are born, they grow, live, journey to new lands, multiply, contend with the torrents of spring, enjoy the abundance of summer, the pensive tranquillity of autumn, and are consumed in the red sunsets of winter. And every epoch of human life, every country, every city, every house, every room, has its own aroma—even as every human being, every family, every generation, has its own aroma. Decades sometimes, indeed often, intrude on one another, and when whole epochs, and events in towns and countries are forgotten, the wrinkles under the eyes, the aroma of the room, are still remembered as something more material and significant than epochal events.

Its own winds blow over every land.

This particular human being, Ivan Ivanovitch Ivanov, remembered life as a town with wooden pavements, with wooden fences along the streets, with little gardens entered by means of small swinging gates,

with heavy aromas of human life pervading the passages, with low-ceiled rooms looking out on the grass in the courtyards. And over his life there blew that wind which has the breath of human life. A crushed leather divan stood in his room, and behind the divan, for ages, cigar ends collected. The books on the table in his room rarely changed and the cloth was always the same: it was a writing table, the cigar ashes had changed the colour of the cloth from green to yellow, they were encrusted and it was impossible to blow them off. In the garden, behind the low windows, there were tall grass, nettles, henbane and weeds. Over his life there blew the wind which has the breath of human life, and this wind stuck him fast in his room.

And there, behind the decades, he remembered the eternally autumnal, rancid evening, reeking of humanness in a degree that brought tremors to the throat. It was the evening in which he had driven away his wife. Until then there had been the bloom of flowers, and the torrents of spring in the fields, and nights abundant with the words, "I love you, I love you, forever, forever!" There had been avalanches of bloom, when in the blooming world there were the sun, the universe and the lakes of her eyes in which it was possible to submerge the universe and the sun; for she it was who filled the universe and the sun. In human joy there was then born an infant, a new Ivan. In the twilight the eyes of the mother were lovely with all the lovely motherhood of the world—in the twilight he used to come to her to kiss her pale hand: the infant slept then, the new Ivan. All this had been. Then there had come that rancid evening, an evening in which a human being feels lonely, and it becomes terrible for him upon the earth, crushed as he is by a surfeit of humanness.

It was not really evening, it was midnight. Outside the windows the rain poured, and it was pitch-dark. A candle burned on the table, and drops of tallow dropped from it on the tablecloth, which since that evening had never been changed. The woman's eyes were puffed, and there were wrinkles under them. He stood by the table, she by the door.

She said:

"Ivan, please understand me, it's all a lie. Forgive me. It was nothing but a moment of incitement. Why, you and I had real happiness together, we loved one another."

Ivan Ivanovitch was bending over the candle and for the hundredth time was reading with deliberation the fragment of paper on which she had written: "Nikolai, it is mere infatuation, but I can't do without you. My husband won't be home today. The gate will be open. Come at eleven, when all will be asleep."

Ivan Ivanovitch put his hand with the piece of paper into his pocket, then, turning from the flame, spoke slowly, as before with deliberation:

"What's forgiveness to do with it? The word does not fit in here. I am not interested in incitements, and what has incitement to do with it? The facts are simple. You've abused my bed with another man. . . . Get out!"

"Ivan, remember—we have a child, a son. . . . "

Ivan mocked her:

"We have a c-olt. And I don't want any of your colts. . . . Get out!"

Then the wrinkles disappeared under her eyes, and there were only eyes alone, full of hatred, contempt and effrontery. She whispered to him, also with deliberation:

"Wretch! I love him, I love him—him, and not you!"

Ivan, taken aback, made no reply. She turned sharply, and slammed the door. He did not go after her. It was quiet behind the door. He stood still. It was quiet behind the door. A quarter of an hour, perhaps, passed thus. Then he rushed toward the door. It was empty behind the door, the infant's bed was empty, a candle burned near the bed. The door was open. He rushed to the passage, into the heavy aroma of a human habitation. The door to outdoors was open. He rushed into the rain, to the front yard. The gate to the street was open. Then he cried out helplessly, humiliatingly and piteously:

"Alenushka——"

There was no response. The street was lost in the darkness and the rain.

Then in the morning a serving-woman brought a note. "Ivan Ivanovitch, be so good,"—she begged him in the note to send her things—hers and her son's only. He gathered all her things together, he spent all day in gathering them, the woman helped him. The woman had twice departed to drink tea and to dine, but he had no thought of eating; each time the woman left he sat down to continue a long letter. In the evening the woman carried away the things in a cart and put the letter in her bosom. Ivan helped her with the cart as far as the street, and in the street he pressed the woman's hand and begged her not to forget to bring an answer. The woman felt awkwardly while he was pressing her hand and withdrawing it, said sensibly:

"What's that to me? If she gives me one, I'll bring it. There's nothing wrong with my feet!"

There was to be no answer, neither today, nor to-

morrow, nor the day after tomorrow. But the day after tomorrow he was to learn that she had left town—for somewhere or other by railway, with all her things; so apparently for good. And, actually, she did leave for good. Ivan Ivanovitch never saw her again. In the course of a year he learned that she was living somewhere in Moscow—in the course of three he learned that she had borne another child, a boy by the name of Nikolai. The boy's surname was his—Ivan Ivanovitch Ivanov's—Nikolai Ivanov.

Behind the crushed leather divan the cigar ends were collecting.

## 2.

She, the mother of these two children, the wife of Ivan Ivanovitch, comprehended love as many women comprehend it, when they follow every step of the man, when they want to know his every thought. In reality hinder him to live, hinder him to think and to work,—when women lose everything of their own, parting first of all with their dignity; such loves inevitably end in ruin, because even the bondage of love is nevertheless bondage, and such loves are destructive. Every human life and every human love may be described in an image, and the life of this woman, in the years after she had left her husband, resembled a very bright red kerchief, a gipsy shawl, which long worn round dubious habitations had gathered unto itself the odour of many kinds of tobaccos and perfumes, but still, within its folds retained something of its old aroma of humanness. Then this shawl, unfolding, fell into the rubbish of a Moscow suburb, into very stifling human rubbish. Her son, Ivan, lived with her sister in the provinces. Her son, Nikolai, lived with her at the beginning,

but later she put him in an orphanage. Seven years from birth he knew the pain of falling sickness for the first time. It happened there, in the resounding corridor of the stone orphanage. His mother had already discovered then that his father, who had not even given his name to the boy, was simply a wretch, for only such wretches dare beget ailing children; moreover, the mother had long considered even herself a wretch in daring to bear a child. In any event, the judgment of human beings should not, and could not be so stern as the judgment of a human being over himself.

Then the mother died. She died worthily, having found herself capable of inspiring her children with love and respect for her. Both Ivan, who lived in a remote place and was well, and Nikolai, who lived within orphanage walls and was afflicted with the falling sickness. She died from typhoid, but the significance of her life was that she had managed to live out her rôle in life.

The children did not know one another. And only after several years did Nikolai, who lived in the orphanage, receive a letter from his brother Ivan, who lived in the provinces. Ivan wrote to make his brother's acquaintance, to establish his brotherly rights. Nikolai sent an answer. Brother Ivan wrote about the river near which he lived, about the hay-loft which stood in the yard, about his comrades in high-school, about birds and meadows. Brother Nikolai wrote about his corridors, about his trade school, about his dormitories. After many letters brother Nikolai wrote to brother Ivan about his illness. Both wrote a great deal about their mother. Each told the other everything to the pettiest detail, all that memory had preserved of what was sacred to both of them—their mother. And when Ivan

in his province had reached his fourteenth year, and his aunt had told him about his father, Ivan wrote to Nikolai and told him that they had a father living. This news made a strange impression on Nikolai (and, perhaps, it was the sort of impression to be expected): Nikolai began to dream about his father. Nikolai hid deep in his heart, which he had learned to conceal in the orphanage dormitories, his dream and thought of his father, the inherited memory and tenderness. Ivan wrote to his father, and his father replied tenderly and at length. Ivan sent his father's letter to his brother Nikolai. Nikolai wrote to Ivan Ivanovitch Ivanov, and the latter did not reply.

(It is necessary, in parentheses, to say that these days of existence were passed by Ivan and Nikolai during the great Russian Revolution.)

## 3.

Ten years of human life is not a long period. And ten days of human life is a tremendous period! Ivan Ivanovitch Ivanov, the father, gathered more and more cigar ends behind the crushed leather divan,—and as before, the town lay there with its wooden pavements, its wooden fences lining the streets, its gates leading into gardens, with heavy aromas of life in the passages, and tall grasses behind the windows. It is of no real relevance to say what Ivan Ivanovitch was or might have been, an instructor in a high-school or a district statistician, over his life there blew the wind which has the breath of human life. And there, in that decade of years, Ivan Ivanovitch remembered the letter from his son, Ivan. It was brought to him early in the morning, the first line said: "I greet you, my dear papa,"

and in that day Ivan Ivanovitch grew younger by ten years, remembered the sun, the bloom of fresh grass, the spring torrents of the years, and only slightly recalled the terrible night, that moment when he passed from one open door to another, to the gate itself, when he shouted through the darkness of the street: "Alenushka!" and during all that day he was tempted again to cry out, only loudly, only something all forgiving, only joyously. And he had then answered his son with joy and at length. It was shortly after this that he received another letter, this time from Nikolai, and it began with the same words as Ivan's letter: "I greet you, my dear papa," and with all his blood, all his hatred, with all the memory of that rancid night redolent of humanness, he had again and again a longing to cry out: "Get out! Get out! To your colts! . . . I don't want any of your mongrels!"

It happened during the autumnal twilight, when the rain caused stifling odours to pervade the passages of the house and it was necessary to light the candles early (it was during the days when the thunders of revolution had receded into the distance). The street gate creaked, someone made a noise with a stick on the steps leading to the passage. The door opened into the vestibule, and someone quietly asked:

"Be so good, does Ivan Ivanovitch Ivanov live here?"

"Yes, here. I am he," answered Ivan Ivanovitch.

A man of low stature entered the room, with a rubber-topped stick, such as cripples use. His shoulders were raised. And in the twilight his face with its thin moustaches like cords appeared very pale, very tired. Thus this human being was to be remembered by Ivan Ivanovitch. He, this human being, strode into the room

and hesitatingly and joyously paused at the threshold. He said:

"It's you—Ivan Ivanovitch?" and he broke into sobs, and stretched forward his hands (his stick had fallen on the floor).

"Papa,—it is I . . . yours . . . your son Nikolai!"

Ivan Ivanovitch stood by the table (by the same table on which the cloth had no longer its original colour), and he did not reach out his hands, he turned away from Nikolai,—he felt how all of a sudden that night of decades ago had entered the room. He said quietly:

"Sit down. How may I serve you?"

Nikolai did not reply, and submissively and quickly sat down in the chair near the door.

"How may I serve you?" repeated Ivan Ivanovitch, more loudly this time.

Nikolai did not understand the question, and hesitated to speak.

"How may I serve you?" shouted Ivan Ivanovitch, in a shrill voice.

"Forgive me, I don't understand. . . . "

Ivan Ivanovitch dragged his arm-chair across the floor, seated himself opposite Nikolai, and leaned his arms on the arms of the chair. Ivan Ivanovitch picked up the stick and handed it to Nikolai. Nikolai took it. Ivan Ivanovitch intently looked at Nikolai with screwed-up eyes.

"Forgive me, I do not know your paternity," began Ivan Ivanovitch in a whisper, screwing up his eyes more and more. "I do not know your paternity," he repeated louder. . . . "Excuse me. It is necessary for us to have an explanation so as to end this misunderstanding. You bear my name because of a misunder-

standing. I do not know who your. . . . " Ivan Ivanovitch paused, and pulled out a cigarette case. "I beg your pardon, do you smoke? No? So! Forgive me, I haven't the honour to know your . . . father. . . . "

Nikolai rose from his chair. Ivan Ivanovitch also rose. The stick again fell to the floor. Ivan Ivanovitch quickly handed it to Nikolai. The eyes of Ivan Ivanovitch were convulsively shut.

"Yes, yes, . . . forgive me! I haven't the honour. I have nothing to do with it! I haven't the honour! I haven't the honour to know with whom . . . with whom your mother had conceived you!"

Nikolai did not wait to hear more from Ivan Ivanovitch. He quickly left the room. He walked hurriedly, stumbling on his right foot. The stick was in his right hand, the right shoulder was raised in a way it is raised only by very ailing men.

"Yes, yes, . . . I haven't the honour! I haven't the honour!" shouted Ivan Ivanovitch after the departing man.

* * *

The brothers Nikolai and Ivan had agreed between them to meet in the town where their father lived. Nikolai had arrived several hours before Ivan. Ivan went from the station to an hotel. He learned that his brother was already there. They had never met before. A candle was burning on the table in the room when Ivan entered, a tall, healthy man in the military uniform of a Colonel. A candle was burning on the table in the room, but Ivan found no one in the room. He asked the corridor attendant, "Where's my brother?" The attendant replied:

"I did not see him go out."

Then, Ivan, looking on the floor, saw there behind the table a prostrate man. The man was embracing the back of a chair. Ivan, a strong man, entangled in straps from the sword and revolver, lifted him in his arms.

"Nikolai, my dear, what's the matter?" he asked, with perturbation. "A fit?"

Nikolai answered quietly:

"Nothing of the sort. I feel well. I was. . . . " His words fatigued him. . . . "I was at Ivan Ivanovitch's, at your father's. He told me that our mother had been . . . that he does not know who my father is, with whom, as he said, my mother had conceived me."

"What? . . . Our mother . . . ?"

A candle was burning on the table in the room. The strong man held the weak by the shoulders. Outside the windows the streets were lost in darkness. On the table, near the candle, there were cigar ends. Soon the strong man was sitting by the side of the weak on the floor. It was thus the two brothers met. Two human beings who had never seen one another but who from the first conscious childhood knew everything about one another. They talked of their mother, whom one of them remembered. And for the human being who lived in that town, to whom they had come, they had a dry word—*wretch*—for he was a wretch to cast aspersions on their mother's memory.

The wooden pavements in provincial towns serve not only to force people to walk in dirt, the pavements serve also the purpose of spreading all sorts of provincial news. And the human being, Ivan Ivanovitch Ivanov, a human being whose life reeked of humanness, had to live through yet another night like the night in which all the doors had been open. It was a night of

incitements, those incitements which had at one time, there, years before, led away his wife. The streets were lost in darkness, the earth wept with rain, and Ivan Ivanovitch stood by the gate and awaited his son, son Ivan, who was round the corner in a room in the Hotel Moskva. And father Ivan Ivanovitch cried into the darkness:

"Ivanushka!"

Son Ivan did not come to his father. And in the morning father Ivan saw his son . . . for the only and the last time, at the railway station. He, the father, stood in a crowd. Two human beings passed him. One leaning on a rubber-topped stick, the other supporting the cripple, a tall, healthy military commissar, harnessed in straps to which a sword and a revolver were attached. He was a fair, red-cheeked, physically fit, self-contained young man. And his father observed the young man's eyes were startlingly like his mother's, like those lakes in which he could at one time sink the world and the sun. The train departed very quickly, whistling as it went and leaving a trail of smoke behind. The father walked away along the wooden pavements, past wooden fences. The wind blew in the streets. In the streets, on wooden pavements, walked a decrepit, grey-haired man. . . .

The passages in the houses were redolent of humanness.

## 4.

In any case, human judgment should not and could not be so stern as the judgment of a human being over himself.

VLADIMIR LIDIN

Vladimir Lidin was born in Moscow, in 1894. He writes in his "Autobiography" that his first memory is of his childhood in his father's shipping office. "There was an odour about this office of vast spaces and far lands." Later, in reading "Dombey and Son," he found some things there reminiscent of this office. "Undoubtedly, I carried away from here for my whole future life an insatiable longing for wandering." After that, he learned oriental languages. The reading of Gogol, Dumas, Grigorievitch and Chekhov stirred his imagination; particularly Chekhov, who influenced his first writing. He began authorship early. He fought against the Germans during the Great War, and later served four years in the Red army. He has travelled extensively.

# GLACIERS

*By* Vladimir Lidin

The travellers set out at dawn. It was a rare autumn day in the mountains, and the air was extraordinarily clear. They were tourists: several Germans with their dullish Alpine stubbornness to overcome mountains and summits, several Georgian students, several guides and ice-breakers, and yet two others who joined the group on the day the climb began, both young geographers,—Kulomzin and Stakhevitch,—friends, of about the same age. As always, the glacier surmounting the five-thousand-metre summit of the mountain shone beautifully and accessibly, luring men on with its deceptive gleam, obstructing the path of the venturous with mists and snow tempests, burying in the snows more than one seeker driven by a supramundane urging and determination of the dreamer.

Mikha Vakaya, a grey-haired old man with young black eyebrows, conducted the group. He had thrice conquered the summit. Now, with Caucasian boneless nimbleness, he bent forward. He was followed by the Georgian students, after them came the two geographers, and in the rear, accustomed as they were to measure their capacities, the German tourists and the guides. At the beginning they walked in meadows and pasture-lands, in barley fields, in pungent mountain grasses, through villages scattered over the slope and hanging precipitously above chasms, from which the moss and the tall grass of the valley showed their

lovely, pensive greens. From the first the geographers walked side by side. They thought the beginning of the ascent auspicious, and the mountain beckoned to them as to others, irresistibly. The ordinary earthly sphere was being slowly left behind. On horseback and on foot, the village inhabitants in broad felt hats, followed their carts filled with hay or vegetables down into the valley, and indifferently glanced back as the usual hurrying group of men whom the eternal gleam of the glacier called with its clear, mist-free radiance. In reality, it was quite different: the mountains deceived men; snow tempests and fogs barred the way, many vain hopes were often dashed during these ascents. Towards mid-day those who walked in front began to lag behind. Kulomzin, a handsome, clean-shaven man, with blue-tinged eyebrows and face, went ahead. More than once he had been the envy of Stakhevitch, who, mealy, short-sighted and somewhat ponderous, had been made unhappy at the sight of his friend even while both were yet students occupying the same form. The meadows and the barley fields were at last left behind, the grass became more scant and more coarse. It was a joy to breathe at this height, the air had not yet become rarefied. The aneroid showed a height of 2,800 metres. Now and then they paused to glance back at the abandoned, wide-stretching earth. New ridges appeared, blue and lilac-tinted declivities, receding strata of eternal geologic chaos, millennial whiteness of glaciers, gorges full of a bluish smoke, clouds and mists. . . . The world at one's feet broadened, gained in grandeur.

"Mishka, just look . . . what beauty!" said Kulomzin, waiting for his wet, tired companion to catch up with him. "Wipe your specs—it's a fabulous world,

brother! Look! There're the ridges—the glacier Aletzvari—we've conquered thirty-five hundred metres. And it was I who made you come here."

The tourists dragged on towards the halting-place for the night. Now the ice-breakers who acted as guides led the way with ropes and mountain choppers, but as before there walked ahead of them all the boneless, nimble-limbed old man, Mikha Vakaya. The colours faded and vanished, the gorges became filled with smoky mists; like flocks of sheep the clouds crept, clinging to the heights. The night was passed in a plateau close to the glacier. A wind sprang up, the weather grew threatening. Tired feet rested, hot tea with cognac slaked the thirst of uncomfortably dry throats. The geographers rested side by side, away from the rest of the party. Their sleeping sacks were ready to receive them.

"I'm glad that I've dragged you up with me, Mishka," said Kulomzin again. "The wind blows many a sin out of a man here . . . one feels better . . . above things, so to speak. I really have much to talk over with you . . . but there'll be plenty of time for that later."

Tired out by the journey, Stakhevitch felt drowsy. He anxiously waited for the moment when he could creep into his sack and fall asleep. With the wind came twilight, the arctic breath of the glacier.

"I'm going to sleep," said Stakhevitch, crawling into his sack. "How much farther have we to go?"

"Two thousand metres or so . . . only it's the hardest part of the journey," said Kulomzin, who was thinking of something else.

He waited before getting into his sack. Gradually the bonfire died down, one by one the members of

the party fell asleep. He sat solitarily, lost in thought, until he began to shiver. Then he followed the example of the others, crept into his sack and was soon asleep. The wind blew fiercely, then ceased.

Morning came, again crystal-clear. The party continued its journey along the glacier. All tokens of life vanished. Nothing but ice was visible. It was the accumulations of centuries, and the ponderous masses reflected the ether, the eternal azure of unclouded skies. The icy way became steeper, the climbers overcame it only with the utmost determination. Then came great fields of boulders, intermittently breaking the continuity of the ice. The ill-shod Georgian students skimmed over the ice, the Germans went forward—and ahead of them all, as before, walked Mikha Vakaya. Morose rocks, scant verdure, inanimate mountain flowers, and glacial streams which did not quench thirst. Mists crept out of crevices, bringing cold and dampness and rain. Now the Germans began to lag behind. Kulomzin walked barely ahead of his friend. Stakhevitch dragged with difficulty, he breathed hard, he was suffering from mountain sickness. His pulse beat fiercely, his lungs struggled for breath. All were affected, and breathed with their mouths. Long before twilight they made a halt for the night; the aneroid showed that a height of 3,700 metres had been attained. Even Mikha Vakaya was tired. He lay on his side; his black eyebrows, the magnificent beak of his humped nose, were raised skyward. Prostrate with fatigue, but happy in this incomparable mountain world which he had conquered, Stakhevitch lay with his spectacles off, surveying the glacial snowy spaces, so extraordinary after earthly constraint.

"Now, Sashka, tell me what you wanted to say," he said, reflectively. "For some time I've had a feeling that you've been keeping something back from me. And now is a good time to listen and to talk. . . . "

"I'll tell you," said Kulomzin, after a pause. "We have for the time rejected our own world . . . so, perhaps, you ought to understand me from a transcendent point of view, freed from earthly feelings. . . . Then everything will seem all right. Wait till tomorrow. I'll then tell you everything. . . . Only let's go higher first."

Stakhevitch said lazily:

"What mysteries. . . . Why don't you speak right out!" Fatigue was overcoming him.

"Never fear! I'll speak out . . . " replied Kulomzin, thinking his own thoughts.

The twilight came quickly, with fog, sooner than they had been expected. The members of the party finished their tea and prepared for sleep. Fatigue overcame all other feelings.

"All the same, do speak straight out!" said Stakhevitch through the overcoming darkness, and almost at once fell asleep. Light clouds of vapour issued from the openings of the sleeping sacks. They all slept. The fogs had brought much dampness.

In the morning they resumed their ascent. Broad compact fields of snow stretched before the climbers. Their gleam, even through the dark eye-glasses, dazzled the eyes. There were acres and acres of snowy whiteness, stalactites, accumulations, reflecting in their perspectives one another.

"What beauty . . . what a world, Sashka!" exclaimed Stakhevitch, conquering the snowy slope. "It's

hard to breathe, but I want to live as never before . . . all the same the real universe is here, and not there on the earth as we have presumed."

The Georgians were showing fatigue. Two of them bled at the nose, their hearts beat fiercely, perturbed by the incredible height, transcendent in its supramundane, millennial magnificence. At two o'clock in the afternoon the party made a halt amid the snows.

"Towards evening we'll reach the summit of the glacier," said Kulomzin. "Think of it, five thousand metres, Misha! Then, if you want to understand, you'll understand everything and you won't judge me. . . . Only understand me according to these heights, and not in earthly fashion. . . . "

"I'll understand," replied Stakhevitch. "Speak!"

They again sat in the snow, away from the others.

"I've been very much tormented," began Kulomzin, with difficulty. "Especially before you, a friend . . . it is about Verotchka I want to speak to you, about your dead wife. . . . "

Stakhevitch glanced at him and for some reason took off his smoked glasses, which he wore over his ordinary spectacles.

"I have no doubt I acted very badly towards you, but don't judge me, brother . . . above all, don't judge Verotchka. She's surely blameless. . . . " And Kulomzin, lying down on his elbow, went on talking, while he surveyed the untrodden snows and slopes. "The fact is, when you married her I bore an old love towards her . . . yet from Moscow. . . . But there was nothing in that. . . . Except for a remote feeling, nothing happened. But during the past year, when you went to Moscow for the conference . . . it was in the Spring . . . well, you know what the Spring is like in

Tiflis . . . and I lost my head and I tempted her. . . . It was love, Misha, that's all I can say! Now it is all in the past, Vera's gone, and it's possible to talk about it now, because there should be truth between the living, if only here, on the summit."

He lapsed into silence. Stakhevitch was also silent.

"And . . . did it go on for long?" he suddenly asked hoarsely.

"It happened only once . . . it was in the evening. . . . There is a moment in the life of a woman for which she should not be judged. Indeed, she told me the next day that it had been madness, that it could not happen again, that she loved only you. I felt I had to tell you everything . . . everything . . . especially here, on this summit, which does not know our earthly falseness. . . . You must understand everything here, and you mustn't judge . . . really, you mustn't! Anyhow, I feel the better for having told you. There should be no untruth between us . . . and we should act like real human beings, Misha!"

Smouldering despair was visible in Stakhevitch's eyes, which gazed at the snow fields stretching endlessly. An immeasurable quiet and purity lay there and pervaded these timeless snows.

"Of course," he at last murmured, "it is all so unexpected and so painful. Well, I'll try . . . I thought it had something to do with Verotchka."

The mists came on. No other word passed between the two friends. With beating hearts, they continued the last stage of the journey, towards the top. For hours they ascended the slope of the glacier, radiant in its unchanging whiteness. And the first, for the fourth time in his life, to reach the summit, was Mikha Vakaya. His eagle-like beak silhouetted against the sky,

he stood there looking down on the slope they had just traversed. The rest of the party dragged on upwards, and, just behind his friend, Stakhevitch reached this incredible, legendary height. A fabulous world rose up before him. Snowy abysses, slopes, icy declivities of glaciers, the radiance of the sun reflected in a thousand glacial ridges and snow fields, all agleam and asparkle with porphyry crystal. In a bottomless chasm, as it were non-existent, like the memory of a remote past, lay the abandoned earth. Here they experienced the mountain ecstasy of triumph and new feelings freed from earthly ways and routine. Overwhelmed by this spectacle created by primordial glacial elements, Stakhevitch stood there and gazed. He suddenly found his companion's hand.

"I'll try to forget everything, Sasha," he said, without turning his face. "I too am not wholly blameless before Vera . . . far from it! No doubt, I wasn't able to make her happy. And I know the chief thing in life is truth . . . without truth there can be no friendship."

Kulomzin returned the pressure of the hand, and also gazed into the vast clear spaces above the clouds. An extraordinary blitheness of spirit possessed him. The radiance of the snow and the mountain wind, as it were, cleansed him of the last trace of any dark haunt. It was purification, and he had expected it; the heights which had beckoned him did not deceive him. They stood thus for a long time, one close to the other. The mountains grew dim, and again lightened. The glacial silence had lulled the cradle of world-creation. The happy men, freed from many feelings, began their return journey. The accompanying ice-breakers went cautiously ahead, cutting tiny steps for the party. The way

became dangerous. They descended slowly, step by step. Fatigue, mountain sickness and nose-bleeding began to trouble them. The late mood of happiness had become transformed into one of weariness, of irritation. With abrupt suddenness, clouds ascended from the crevasses; a snow storm began to rage; its appearance was instantaneous, as often happens in the mountains. The wind blew fiercely, ready to demolish glaciers, to send down avalanches of snow, and human beings down with them. The pack-men in the rear were succumbing under their burdens. Nevertheless, they all managed to crawl down a way and to take shelter behind a slope. Pale and exhausted, they paused at the foot of the slope. It was imperative to traverse the field before they could take shelter for the night near the field of boulders. Kulomzin gave his comrade the last swallow of brandy he had in his flask. Stakhevitch drank it, without wiping his mouth. He had a distraught, unhappy look. The snow clung to his clothes, and he made no effort to shake it off.

"All the same, it's terrible that you should have thrown a shadow on Verotchka's memory," he said, with frozen, tightened lips. "Until now it was the one great thing in my life. . . . I suppose you're quite right . . . all the same, it's terrible!"

Within half an hour they began their way across the field, swept by the drifts of the unabating storm. They walked step in step, one beside the other, so as not to lag behind and get lost. This senseless, exhausting way continued for hours. At last, the storm began to abate, but not before the snow on the garments of the tired men had hardened into ice, which would not melt. Towards evening they reached shelter, and threw themselves down, without building a bonfire or making

any effort to thaw the snow to slake their thirst. Sleep obliterated all sights, the memory of the whole day.

"I feel badly, Misha, from what you've just said," said Kulomzin from his sack. "I thought that you'd understand . . . human beings are not always to blame for their actions—especially if they have borne them like burdens, and repented."

"That does not make it any lighter for me!" replied Stakhevitch with sudden and extraordinary rancour. "Your repentance is necessary to you . . . but for me the whole thing is terrible, terrible! Please understand that!"

He groaned in his sack, and he wanted to move away, for the nearness of the other became unbearable.

Kulomzin lay sleepless, using the last remnants of his will to conquer his fatigue. But his fatigue conquered.

In the morning they resumed their journey, with morose, weary hearts, with unslaked thirsts. The glacier, with its summit, lay now behind. Again fields of boulders, glacial slopes, stones, glacial streams, and the green of wet cliffs. And suddenly, along these steeps, Kulomzin saw his comrade overtaking him. Stakhevitch was now at his side.

"Tell me, Sasha," said Stakhevitch, getting in front of him and looking very close into his eyes, while for an instant an unappeasable hatred disfigured his habitually dreamy face, "you surely don't think that after all that's happened a friendship between us is possible? . . . Why, you've lied to me in the course of a whole year, without shame and without pity . . . yes, you've lied to me. . . . And only yesterday you've dishonoured Vera's memory. No, I can't, I can't quietly

forgive it all. . . . It would be too outrageous, too horrible,—such a friendship! It would be worse than being enemies!"

All out of breath, but moved by his rage, he strode forward, and, overtaking the Georgians, went along with them. Kulomzin walked in the rear. His handsome bluish face was weary from a sleepless night; it showed irresolution, fatigue.

The party descended many slopes, halting several times. The earth appeared nearer and nearer. The aneroid pointed to thousands of metres having been left behind. The great spaces tightened, the earthly ravines drew together. They took shelter at the foot of the glacier, where they had rested on the upward journey. Once more the conquered remote slopes shone, and the summit of the glacier gleamed with white snows. An earthly everyday mood and order of feelings repossessed these human beings. Stakhevitch flung down his sack at some distance from his companion, and prepared for sleep. Kulomzin sat solitarily, lost in sadness. In the morning they would take the much-trodden path of the glacier, after which they would traverse the scant meadows, then pastures, then barley fields, then the low earth. He rose from his place and walked over to his comrade and sat down at his side.

"Listen, Misha," he said, with immeasurable sadness, "there, on the summit, you said that you understood everything and forgave me . . . I swear to you, I never wanted to hurt you or to deceive you. It just happened. . . . After all, we are human beings! I felt this particularly on the heights, and you too. . . . "

Stakhevitch did not reply at once.

"I beg of you only one thing . . . go away . . .

leave me alone!" he said from his sack, while he closed his eyes, so unbearable for him was the nearness of the other.

In this feeling of rejection, in solitude, in the cold of twilight, Kulomzin at last fell asleep. It was the long, joyless sleep of return. The damp mists, crawling out of the crevices, with furtive insatiableness clung to the heights and the cliffs. Then, in the morning, driven away by the sun, they crept back, as was their habit, into their shelters until a new twilight should call them forth. The day rose, a huge bird circled above, silhouetted against the radiant cold skies. Kulomzin lay still with open eyes, and watched its broad unhurried flight. He began to crawl out of his sack and suddenly saw that the field was empty, deserted of human life; only the bristly scant grass showed signs of human beings having taken shelter there for the night. They had gone, without having noticed him lying there away from the others. His companion had not awakened him. He got out of the sack, walked round the field, and found no one. The final path, much trodden by the feet of thousands of excursionists, wound its way downward. The earth was near. He gathered up his sack, bound it in Alpine fashion to his back, and began his way down the trodden path.

EFIM ZOZULYA

Efim Zozulya, born in Moscow, in 1891, is Russia's one satirist. He had passed his childhood in the manufacturing town of Lodz and, after a schooling in Odessa, returned to it. Owing to his keen sense of observation, his life here among petty provincials was to exercise an enormous influence on the character of his future creative writings. As a result of revolutionary activity he on more than one occasion had known the inside of gaol. He had worked for a while as a sign painter. He had always taken an interest in aesthetic questions and in philosophy. At 18 he began writing stories but later dropped it as an occupation not worthy of a serious mind. Later he resumed it. His first contributions appeared in the newspapers.

Recognition has come to him, and a definitive edition of his works is in the course of publication. His stories may be divided into two *genres:* realism, with a tinge of satire; and pure satire. An example of each is presented here. The Bolsheviks have accepted Zozulya, but satire is a double-edged weapon, and it is a question whether "A Tale About Ak and Humanity" isn't as much a stricture upon Lenin and revolution as it is upon the humanity he had tried to reform.

# A TALE ABOUT AK AND HUMANITY

*By* Efim Zozulya

## *1. The Placards.*

The houses and the streets had an ordinary appearance. And, above them, the unchanging sky was azure. And the grey masks of the pavement stone were, as always, impenetrable and indifferent, while maddened men, from whose faces tears dropped into pails of paste, were adorning the walls with placards.

Their text was simple, pitiless and irrevocable.

Here it is:

"*To all without exclusion.*

"An examination of the inhabitants of the town with regard to their right to live is being carried out by districts by special commissions consisting of three members of the Courts of the Higher Decisions. Inhabitants, acknowledged to be superfluous (unnecessary), are obliged to depart from life within twenty-four hours. The right of appeal is allowed within that time. The appeal must be made in writing and will be delivered to the Central Court of the Higher Decisions. A reply will be given within three hours. Superfluous human beings, unable either from weakness of will or from love of living to depart from life, will be dealt with by the Courts of the Higher Decisions, who will call on friends, neighbours or special armed companies to execute the sentence.

"*Remarks.* 1. The inhabitants of the town, with

complete obedience, are obliged to submit to the acts and regulations of the members of the Courts of the Higher Decisions. Truthful answers must be given to all questions. An official report will be given of the characteristics of every person judged to be superfluous.

2. This decree will be carried out with irrevocable severity. Human rubbish, hindering the reconstruction of life on the basis of justice and happiness, must be pitilessly destroyed. This decree concerns, without exclusion, all citizens—men and women, rich and poor.

3. The departure from town of any person whatsoever while the examination with regard to the right to live is in progress is absolutely forbidden."

*2. The First Waves of Perturbation.*

"Have you read?"

"Have you read?"

"Have you read?!"

"Have you read?!! Have you read?!!"

"Have you seen?!! Have you heard?!!"

"Have you read?!!"

Crowds began to gather all over the town. Traffic became congested. From sudden weakness pedestrians leaned against house walls. Many wept. Some had fainting spells. Towards evening their number reached a tremendous figure.

"Have you read?!!"

"How terrible? Who's ever heard of such a thing!"

"Why, we ourselves elected the Courts of the Higher Decisions! We ourselves gave them full powers!"

"Yes, that's true."

"We ourselves are to blame for the monstrous situation."

"Yes, that's true. We are to blame. That's because we ourselves wanted to create a better life. But who could have thought that the Courts would approach the question in so simple and terrible a manner?!"

"But what names have been chosen for the composition of the Courts! Oh, what names!"

"How do you know? Have they published a list of the members?"

"I've heard from an acquaintance. Ak has been chosen Chairman."

"Oh, you don't say! Ak? That's a piece of good fortune!"

"Yes. Yes. It's a fact!"

"What good fortune! He's a magnificent personality."

"Of course! We must not be too anxious: he's sure to weed out the human rubbish. We need not fear injustice."

"Dear citizen, what do you think? Will I be left among the living? I am a decent sort of man. Do you know, once during the wreck of a ship twenty passengers saved themselves in a boat. But the boat could not stand such a huge load, and all were threatened with death. In order that fifteen might be saved, it was necessary that five should fling themselves into the sea. I was one of the five. I volunteered to do it. Don't look so incredulously. Now I'm old and feeble. Haven't you really heard of this happening? The papers were full of it at the time. My four comrades perished. A chance saved me. What do you think? Will they spare me?"

"And me, citizens? And me? I gave away all my

possessions to the poor. That was long ago. I have documents to prove it."

"I don't know, really. All depends on the point of view of the Courts of the Higher Decisions."

"Allow me to inform you, esteemed citizens, that primitive usefulness to neighbours by no means justifies the existence of human beings on earth. Why, in that case, every stupid wet-nurse would have the right to live. That's an old notion. You're behind the times!"

"What, then, is the value of a human being?"

"Yes, what is his value?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, you don't know! Why do you poke your muzzle here with your opinions if you don't know?"

"I'm sorry. I only said what I thought."

"Citizens! Citizens! Look! Look! They're running! What a confusion! A panic!"

"Oh, Heavens! Heavens! . . . Ah! . . . Save yourselves! Save yourselves!"

"Stop! Don't run!"

"Don't make the panic worse!"

"Stop!"

### *3. The Fugitives.*

The crowds ran in the streets. Red-cheeked young men ran, with terror-stricken faces. Modest clerks serving in offices and establishments. Bridegrooms in clean cuffs. Choir singers from amateur societies. Dandies. Tellers of anecdotes. Billiard players. Evening visitors to the moving pictures. Career-pursuers, evil-doers, sharpers, with white foreheads and curly hair. Hypocritical rakes. Wicked drunkards. Jolly fellows, hooligans, Adonises, visionaries, lovers, cyclists.

Broad-shouldered squabblers, squabbling from having nothing else to do, talkers, deceivers, long-haired hypocrites, petty grief-indulgers, with dark sad eyes, behind whose sadness, concealed by youth, lay cold emptiness. Young churls with full, smiling lips, vain-glorious adventurers, scandalmongers, good-hearted failures, clever profligates.

Corpulent, voracious, lazy women also ran. And lean shrews, nagging, boring women, tedious females, wives of fools and wise men, gossipers, betrayers, the envious and the greedy, now distorted with fear. Proud she-fools, the good-for-nothing good, those who from boredom dyed their hair, the colourless libertines, the lonely, the helpless, the brazen, the begging, the supplicating, who, from terror, had lost all outward decorum.

Stooped old men ran. And squat men, small men, tall men, and handsome and malformed men.

Men who managed houses, pawnbrokers, ironmongers, carpenters, artisans, gaolers, grocers, good-natured publicans, decorous grey-haired lackeys, respectable fathers of families, those who had battened on dupes of their baseness, venerable sharps and fat scoundrels.

They ran in a dense, impetuous, ruthless mass. Loads of rags enveloped their bodies and extremities. Hot steam poured from their mouths. Curses and wails resounded through the concealed indifference of the abandoned edifices.

Many ran carrying possessions. With twisted fingers they dragged pillows, boxes, drawers. They seized their precious gems, their children, their money. They shouted, then returned, lifting their arms in terror, and then ran again.

But they were all turned back. All. Such beings as

themselves shot at them, ran in front of them, beat them with sticks, fists, stones; there was biting too, and terrible outcries; the crowds fell back, leaving behind their killed and wounded.

Towards evening the town resumed its normal appearance. The trembling bodies of the inhabitants returned to their homes and flung themselves on their beds. A brief poignant hope desperately struggled in tight, feverish skulls.

### *4. A Simple Procedure.*

"Your name?"

"Boss."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty."

"Occupation?"

"I make cigarettes."

"Tell the truth!"

"I am telling the truth. I've worked honestly at my trade for fourteen years and supported my family."

"Where is your family?"

"Here they are. This is my wife. This is my son."

"Doctor, examine the Boss family."

"I have done so."

"Well, what can you tell us about them?"

"Citizen Boss is anaemic. General condition, average. His wife suffers with headaches and rheumatism. The boy is healthy."

"Good. You may go, doctor. Citizen Boss, what are your pleasures? What do you love?"

"I love people and life generally."

"Be more precise, citizen Boss. To the point."

"I love. . . . Well, what do I love? . . . I love my

son. . . . He is so clever with the fiddle. . . . I love my meals, though to be sure, I'm not a glutton. . . . I am fond of women. . . . It is pleasant to look at handsome women and girls passing in the street. I love, when I'm tired in the evening, to rest. . . . I love making cigarettes. . . . I can make five hundred an hour. . . . I love life."

"Be calm, citizen Boss! Stop whimpering; What do you say, psychologist?"

"Clap-trap colleague! Rubbish! The most ordinary creatures! A poor existence. Temperament semi-phlegmatic, semi-sanguine. Activity feeble. Class—the last. Hope for betterment—none. Passivity—seventy-five per cent. Mrs. Boss—still lower. The boy is commonplace, but, perhaps. . . . How old is your son, citizen Boss? Stop whimpering!"

"Thirteen."

"Don't be alarmed. For the time being your son will remain among the living. As for you. . . . In any case, that is none of my affair. Render your decision, colleague!"

"In the name of the Courts of the Higher Decisions, with the object of cleansing life of superfluous human rubbish, of indifferent beings, I order you, citizen Boss, and your wife, to depart from this life within twenty-four hours. Be quiet! Don't bawl! Sanitary officer, calm the woman! Call the guard! It doesn't look as if they'll manage it without assistance."

### *5. Characteristics of the Superfluous Preserved in the Grey Cabinet.*

The Grey Cabinet was situated in the corridor in the department of the Courts of the Higher Decisions.

This cabinet had the usual appearance: it was a solid, pensively stupid affair, like most cabinets. It was neither in width nor in height more than seven feet, but it was the grave of several thousand human beings. It was marked with two brief inscriptions:

"Catalogue of the Superfluous."

The catalogue was divided into several sections, and among others were:

"The indiscriminately impressionable."

"Petty partisans."

"The Passive."

"Without equilibrium."

and so forth.

The characteristics were stated briefly and objectively. In some instances, to be sure, there were sharp remarks, but these were, inevitably, red-pencilled by Ak, who added his commentary to the effect that it was not necessary to abuse the superfluous.

Here are some specimen records of the characteristics of the superfluous:

"Superfluous Male No. 14,741."

"Health average. He visits acquaintances, without being either useful or interesting to them. He is free with advice. In the bloom of his strength he had seduced a girl, then cast her off. He regards the acquisition of furniture after marriage as the most important function in life. His brain is drowsy, lymphatic. He has no capacity for work. To the question what he considered to be the most interesting thing he had encountered in life, he told of his visit to the restaurant 'Quissisana' in Paris. A common creature. Category of the lower strata. Heart feeble. Within 24 hours."

"Superfluous Male No. 14,623.

"A worker in a cooper's shop. Class—mediocre. Has no love for his work. His mind in everything works along lines of least resistance. Physically, well; but spiritually, he suffers from a common disease: the fear of life. The fear of freedom. When free, during holidays, he stupefies himself with alcohol. During the revolution he exhibited some energy: he wore a red ribbon, and hoarded potatoes and everything else he could get hold of. He was afraid of falling short. He prided himself on his proletarian origin. He took no active share in the revolution: he was afraid. He loves sour cream. He beats children. The *tempo* of his life is uniformly dispirited. Within 24 hours."

"Superfluous Male No. 15,201.

"He knows eight languages, but says that it is tedious to listen even to one. He is fond of ingenious trifles. Very self-confident. His self-confidence is based on his knowledge of languages. Demands esteem. Indulges in gossip. Towards real animate life indifferent, like an ox. Afraid of beggars. Sweet-tempered in his relations out of fear. Is fond of killing flies and other insects. Rarely experiences joy. Within 24 hours."

"Superfluous Female No. 4,356.

"Scolds her servants out of boredom. Secretly skims the cream from the milk and the fat top layer from the *bouillon*. Reads shilling-shockers. For days on end lounges on the couch. Her greatest dream: to have a frock with yellow sleeves and slit sides. For twelve years she was loved by a gifted inventor. She did not know his occupation, and thought he was an electri-

cian. She abandoned him and married a tradesman in leather. No children. Is often capricious and hysterical without cause. Wakes in the night to order a samovar and a snack. A wholly superfluous creature. Within 24 hours."

### *6. At Work.*

An army of specialists had gathered round Ak and the Courts of the Higher Decisions. It consisted of doctors, psychologists, observers and writers. They all worked with extraordinary speed. There were occasions when at a given hour the specialists speeded a good hundred persons on the way to the other world. And into the Grey Cabinet there flew a hundred records of characteristics, in which the lucidity of expression vied with the firm assurance of the authors.

From morning till night the work went on space in the chief department. House commissions came and went. Companies of executors of sentences came and went, while behind the desks, as in an immense editorial office, dozens of human beings were sitting and writing, with quick, firm, unreflecting hands.

Ak looked at all this with narrow, strong, impenetrable eyes, and thought his own thoughts, from which his body grew more and more hunched, and his large, impetuous, stubborn head more and more grey.

Something rose up between him and his servants, something erected itself as it were between his tense, sleepless thought and the blind, unreflecting hands of the executors.

### *7. Ak's Doubts.*

One day the members of the Courts of Higher Decisions came into the department with the intention of delivering their reports.

They did not find Ak in his usual place. They sought and did not find him. They sent out messengers, called on the telephone without success.

Only after two hours they found him by chance in the Grey Cabinet.

Ak was sitting in the Cabinet on the death warrants of the superfluous, with an intense expression of thought in his eyes, unusual even for him.

"What are you doing here?" they asked Ak.

"As you see, I am thinking," answered Ak, wearily.

"But why in the Cabinet?"

"It's the most fitting place. I am thinking of human beings, and to think of human beings profitably it is best to do it in the immediate proximity of the decrees of their destruction. Only sitting on the documents of the destruction of man is it possible to learn something of his extraordinary strange life."

Someone laughed shallowly and emptily.

"Don't you laugh!" said Ak warningly, waving someone's record of characteristics in his hand. "Don't you laugh! I think the Courts of the Higher Decisions are passing through a crisis. An examination of the records of those who have perished has led me to seek new paths towards progress. You have all learned, quickly and malignantly, to prove the superfluity of this or that existence. Even the least gifted among you is ready, in a few phrases, to demonstrate this with conviction. And here am I sitting and thinking is your way just?"

Once more Ak lapsed into thought, then sighed bitterly, and said quietly:

"What's to be done? Where's the issue? When one examines the lives of the living, one arrives at the conclusion that three-fourths of them should be rooted

out of existence. But when one examines those who have perished, a doubt comes; wouldn't it have been better if one had loved them and pitied them? That's where, in my opinion, is the blind alley of the human question, the blind alley of human history."

Again Ak lapsed into a sad silence, and he dug into the mountain of records of the condemned dead, and unhealthily began to pore over their officially painful brevity.

The members of the Courts departed. No one contradicted. In the first place, because it was useless to contradict Ak; in the second, because no one dared to contradict him. But they all felt that a new decision was ripening, and they nearly all felt dissatisfied: here was a matter which had become a matter of custom, everything was clear and definite, and now it looked as if it all would have to be changed for something else. But for what?

What else has this man's brain contrived, this brain which had such a fabulous power over the town?

### *8. The Crisis.*

Ak vanished.

He always vanished when he fell into meditation. They sought him everywhere and did not find him. Someone said that Ak was sitting outside the town and weeping. Others said that Ak was running about his garden on all fours and gnawing the earth.

The activity of the Courts of the Higher Decisions weakened. Its work ceased to run smoothly with the disappearance of Ak. The inhabitants simply put up iron bars across their doors and would not let the servants of the Courts in. In some districts the ques-

tions of the members of the Courts as regards the right to live were answered with laughter, and it even happened that the superfluous seized the members of the Courts of the Higher Decisions and examined them as to their right to live and wrote mock records of characteristics, which in no wise differed from those preserved in the Grey Cabinet.

Chaos possessed the town. Superfluous, good-for-nothing inhabitants who had not yet been executed became so brazen as to appear in the streets and to make good cheer with their neighbours, to give themselves up to all sorts of diversions, and even to enter into marriage.

Congratulations were exchanged in the streets:

"Ended! Ended! Hurrah!"

"The examinations of the right to live have come to an end!"

"Don't you think, citizen, life's become very pleasant? There's less human rubbish about. Why, one can breathe now!"

"Aren't you ashamed, citizen? You really think that those who've left this life hadn't a right to it? Oh, I know some who haven't the right to live even a single hour, but they're still alive and will go on living! On the other hand, how many really decent people have perished? If you only knew!"

"That's nothing. Mistakes are unavoidable. Tell me, do you know what's become of Ak?"

"I don't know."

"Ak is sitting on a tree outside town and weeping."

"Ak is running about on all fours and gnawing the earth."

"Let him weep."

"Let him go on gnawing."

"You are rejoicing prematurely, citizens! Prematurely, I say. Ak is returning this evening, and the Courts of the Higher Decisions will resume their work."

"How do you know?"

"I know. There's still an awful lot of human rubbish left. It's necessary to clean up things thoroughly. Thoroughly!"

"You're very hard, citizen."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Citizens! Citizens! Look! Look!"

"New placards are being put up."

"Look!"

"Citizens! What a joy! What good fortune!"

"Citizens, read!"

"Read!"

"Read! Read!"

"Read!"

### *9. The New Placards*

Men were running breathlessly round the streets, with pails full of paste. Packets of huge rose-tinted placards were being unfurled and, with a joyous crackle, were being pasted on to walls of houses. Their text was precise, clear and simple:

"*To all without exclusion.*

"From the moment of the publication of this decree all inhabitants of the town are allowed to live. Live, multiply and fill the earth. The Courts of the Higher Decisions have fulfilled their stern obligations and will hereafter be called the Courts of the Higher Delicacy. You are all excellent, citizens, and your rights to life are indisputable.

"The Courts of the Higher Delicacy will appoint special commissions consisting of three members whose duty it shall be to pay daily visits to homes and to congratulate their occupants on the fact of their existence and to note their observations in special 'Joyous Records.'

"The members of these commissions shall have the right to question citizens as to the manner of their life, and citizens, if they so desire, may answer in detail. The latter is desirable. The joyous observations shall be preserved in the rose-tinted Cabinet for posterity."

### *10. Normal Life Resumed.*

The doors, the windows, the balconies were all opened. Loud human voices, laughter, singing and music resounded from them. Stout, incapable girls began to play on the piano. Gramophones dinned from morning till night. Fiddles, clarinets and guitars also made themselves audible. In the evening men took off their coats, sat themselves on the balconies, and, stretching out their legs, sighed with pleasure. The traffic in the streets grew animated. Young men, taking young women out with them, went driving in cabs and motor cars. The cafés and confectionery shops were full of customers enjoying pastries and cool drinks. Trinket shops which sold mirrors did a bustling business. Men and women bought mirrors and enjoyed their reflections. Artists and photographers were over-run with orders for portraits. The portraits were put into frames and adorned the walls. In one instance they caused a murder, which the newspapers made much of. It happened like this. A young man hired a furnished room and demanded that the portraits of the parents of his land-

lord and landlady be removed. The landlord and the landlady were offended and killed the young man, and threw him out of a fifth-story window on to the street.

Feelings of personal dignity and self-love developed tremendously. Collisions and quarrels became a common occurrence. Such colloquies as the following became the rule:

"It is evident that you're alive only because of some mistake. The Courts of the Higher Decisions did its work carelessly."

"Yes, very carelessly, when it left such as you alive."

Generally speaking, these quarrels went unnoticed in the normal course of life. Human beings improved their table, cooked all sorts of jams. Warm knit apparel became in demand, as everyone held his health in high regard.

The members of the Courts of the Higher Delicacy regularly visited homes and asked their occupants how they managed.

Many replied that they managed very well, and even tried to convince their questioners of this.

"Just look!" they said, smiling with self-satisfaction and rubbing their hands. "We're pickling some cucumbers, he-he! And we have some pickled herrings, too. Our larder is better than it was, thank heavens. . . . "

Others complained of inconveniences and lamented the fact that the work of the Courts of the Higher Decisions had been cut prematurely short.

"Last evening I was in a tram, and just think of it! There wasn't a single unoccupied place. . . . What a disgrace! Both my wife and I had to stand up. There're a good many superfluous people left. They nudge you

everywhere—the devil take them! A pity they weren't removed when there was the chance!"

Still others were perturbed for different reasons.

"Just consider! Neither on Wednesday nor on Thursday did any congratulate me on my existence. Shameless, I say! And what will you say to that? Is it, then, necessary for me to come to you to be congratulated, eh?"

### *11. The End of the Tale.*

In Ak's office, as before, the work went on apace: men were sitting there and writing. The Rose-tinted Cabinet was full of joyous records and observations. Carefully and in detail were described the birthdays, the marriages, the journeys, the dinners and the suppers, the love stories, indeed all manner of happenings, and some of the records bore the character and appearance of short stories and novels. The inhabitants requested the members of the Courts of the Higher Delicacy to publish them in the form of books, and they had plenty of reading.

Ak was silent.

He grew only more and more hunched and more and more grey.

Sometimes he got into the Rose-tinted Cabinet and remained sitting there a long time, just as he had done before in the Grey Cabinet.

Once he jumped out of the Rose-tinted Cabinet with the cry:

"It's necessary to kill them! To kill them! To kill them!"

But, on seeing the white fingers of his servants hur-

rying speedily across the paper, describing the living with the same zeal with which they had formerly described the dead, Ak waved a hand, ran out of the office and disappeared.

He disappeared forever.

There were many legends concerning the disappearance of Ak, and all sorts of rumours, but Ak was never again found.

And the human beings, of whom there were so many in town, whom at first Ak wanted to kill and afterwards pitied, and whom later he again wanted to kill, human beings among whom are many good people and not a little rubbish, continue to this day to live as if there had been no Ak at all, as if there had been no one to raise the question as regards one's right to live.

# THE MOTHER

*By* Efim Zozulya

She was tiny, prickly and nimble as a boy. As for her daughter Nastya, she was a strong, grown, by no means young girl, with a flat waist.

It was evening. The daughter was making haste to clean the flat, which consisted of one room and a kitchen. The mother was standing in the middle of the room, propping her tawny face on the palm of her hand, and growling:

"That I should have given birth to such riff-raff. . . . You'll yet drive me to my grave. . . . But wait, your time's coming. . . . You'll realize when it's too late. . . . "

She growls malignantly, with an inner agony, but Nastya pays no attention to her. She anxiously rearranges the curtains over the window, she fusses with some variegated paper fans on the brown chest of drawers, she brushes the dust from the fly-specked photographs.

These photographs show young persons in fine postures, but with frightened faces; this is due to the strain of being photographed.

As she brushes from them the dust and the tokens of attention they had received from flies, Nastya with an involuntary intentness gazes at them, letting her hand with the dust-rag drop to her side, and lapses into thought. . . .

"Yes, look at your scoundrels!" the old woman goes on growling. "Look, empty-head! . . . Had your

father been alive, you might have been a real lady, but what's to be expected now?"

At this point the silence of the daughter comes to an end.

"Why do you go on barking? Keep quiet, can't you?"

She wants to say something else, but there is a knock on the door, a very polite voice is heard: "May I come in?"—and, holding a top-hat in his hand, his pomaded head glistening, Iakov Grigorievitch makes his appearance in the room—he is a suitor for Nastya's hand, and by no means the first.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Nastya greets him with affected laughter. "You've come just in time to see mother act some scenes. . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! Just think of it, she's jealous of you! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

She claps her hands and repeats the joke five times.

Iakov Grigorievitch, a clerk, with small fair moustaches, smiles condescendingly and, bowing urbanely before the old woman, mutters:

"Yes, it happens sometimes."

The old woman silently turns her back, walks into the kitchen and sits down on the trunk there. A silence of five minutes ensues.

Nastya takes the top-hat from Iakov Grigorievitch, passes her hand over it as if in a caress and, sitting down, begins to relate how men in the street give her no peace, how a student lodger living at her widowed sister's has been heaping his attentions on her, and how this sister is jealous of her because of her lodger. Quite apart from all this, she recalls how one acquaintance had shot himself on her account, how another had jilted his fiancée, and how a third had chucked his wife . . . all for her sake. It was only

lately that someone had written her asking her to go with him to a cinema film, while another. . . .

But at the most interesting point of her narration her mother's malignant, tortured voice is heard from the kitchen:

"Don't lie so loudly, you fool! It's disgusting!"

Nastya jumps up and looks round helplessly. She feels annoyed and ashamed, but Iakov remains unembarrassed though silent; he smiles condescendingly. The mother's voice in the kitchen goes on grumbling:

"A student! A student! The cinema film! Paying his attentions!" (she mimicked her daughter). "Good-for-nothings, all of them! They're eager enough to shame a girl. After that, it's tra-la-la! Catch the wind in the fields! But there's no one in sight."

The old woman goes on grumbling for a long time, but neither Iakov Grigorievitch nor Nastya shows the least embarrassment now: they have become used to it.

After half an hour they can hear some one fussing in the kitchen. It is the old woman preparing herself a bed on the trunk.

Nastya sits down closer to Iakov Grigorievitch, and smooths his top-hat more tenderly than before. And more quietly, almost in whispers, she tells him about the students and the attentions they pay her. . . . As for Iakov Grigorievitch, he puts his arm round her waist and begins to kiss her. . . .

They go on kissing a long time, and they go on whispering, pausing now and then to listen to the restless sniffling of the old woman in the kitchen and, with watchful eyes on the door, to divert themselves one with the other more and more.

"To have to put up with it in one's own house!"

they hear the old woman grumble. "In one's own house, shameless hussy! Hussy! No shame, no conscience! Far better had I never borne you! On Monday I'll go to the labour exchange. I'll find myself a job as a nurse. It'll be only five roubles a month, but at least I'll have my own tea and sugar. I don't want such children!"

There is no end to the old woman's indignation, but they pay no attention to her. Nastya is happy, and now of her own good will she embraces her lover with sighs. . . .

The old woman cannot endure it any longer: she jumps up, puts her dress on, throws a shawl over her shoulder and leaves the house to take shelter for the night at the home of her other daughter, the widowed one.

The widow had two rooms and a kitchen in her flat. One of the rooms had been lately engaged by a man of nondescript character. The other was the widow's room. There was an extra bed in the kitchen for a maid, but there was no maid to occupy it.

As she climbs the crooked wooden stairway, the mother hears the same affected laughter as she had heard at Nastya's, and the exclamation of her daughter's:

"So you think me strange? Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . In what way am I strange?"

"You're both a strange and a fascinating woman!" a masculine voice answered her. "You have so much in you. . . . You're so full of life!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughs the widow, while in the heat of explanation the mother makes her appearance.

The laughter suddenly subsides.

The lodger, a worn-looking man, no longer young,

stands in the doorway of his room, his back inclined against the jamb; he is smoking. The widow is sitting on the divan in lilac negligée and is coquettishly fingering the beads on her breast.

"Why so late, mother?" she greets the newcomer quite amiably. "There's wind out-of-doors, and there's frost, and you've come with nothing but a shawl on."

The old woman makes no answer. She extinguishes the light of the tiny lamp in the kitchen and lies down on the bed.

"Why don't you answer?" the widow asks, this time angrily. She is not less irritable than her mother. "I suppose you've quarreled again with Nastya? . . . Do you know, Ivan Antonovitch," she turns to her lodger, "if you're really looking for a strange woman, there's my esteemed mother. D'you know, she's always running away from Nastya to me, or from me to Nastya. It's a huge joke! Now she has a quarrel with me, then with Nastya. There's really a strange woman for you!"

The expression, "a strange woman," is, for some reason, regarded by the old woman as humiliating to herself. She realizes from her daughter's voice that her visit here has been ill-timed, and this irritates her the more.

"If you grudge me the clean sheet on which I lie," she grumbles, "then I'll manage to sleep on the floor."

And, with an inarticulate sound, she gets out of the bed with her boyish nimbleness and, spreading some rags, lies down on the floor.

The widow is beside herself with rage. She is not so patient as Nastya.

"Have you come here to make scenes? What have I done to you? Why do you do this? Why? . . . Do

you know," she says, turning with pathos to her lodger, "she is so malicious, she is so intent on doing harm! Ah, if you knew how she drives me almost to madness! I'm not responsible for myself!"

"You'll yet drive me to my grave," the old woman answers from the floor. "That I should have given birth to such riff-raff . . . may they go to perdition! Tomorrow I'll go to the labour exchange. I'll find myself a job as a nurse. It'll only be five roubles a month, but at least I'll have my own tea and sugar. I don't want such children! Let fire consume them!"

The widow is perturbed and wants to continue her conversation with her lodger, who says to her:

"Don't let yourself be annoyed, Liudmilla Vassilyevna! It's nothing. All old people have their crotchets. Let us return to what we were discussing. Why don't you come into my room? Please. It's quiet there and cosy."

After half an hour the old woman, who cannot sleep, hears laughter, whisperings, sounds resembling the sound of kisses.

. . . Without saying a word, the old woman quickly rises from her hard bed, throws the shawl over her head and disappears behind the door.

In the street the wind tears the shop-signs. White drifts sweep from the roofs and rise from the pavements.

Dishevelled, shrinking from the cold, drawing the shawl tightly round her, she hurries to the street crossing and suddenly stops, not knowing where to go further. The street is deserted. No human being is visible except the figure of the military policeman. And she casts on the snow a long blue shadow.

VALENTIN KATAEV

Valentin Kataev was born in 1897, in Odessa, of a priestly family. In 1916 he went to the front as a volunteer, was twice wounded and gassed. During the civil war in the Ukraine he was several times arrested by the Reds and the Whites, and spent many months in prison. He began writing verse when he was nine, and in 1914 he met Ivan Bunin and came under his influence. The accompanying story was written while on active service. Kataev is much interested in the theatre and his plays have seen production.

# FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN

*By* Valentin Kataev

"Women love me," said the young handsome soldier with short bristly hair to his ailing comrades.

He stood in the middle of the hut. Besides him, there were three other sick men. They were lying on wide boards, which were covered with dry rotted straw. Two of them were indifferently gazing at the ceiling, while the third lay still in a corner, all wrapped up like a woman in tatters. He was frozen.

It was a northern winter, deep and overcast. There were wooden cottages, and firs which resembled pencils. Above the railway station there were patches of steam from an engine, and slanting clouds of crows. There were goods trucks with red crosses and stacks of spotted birch logs.

The ailing soldiers were weary of tedium and inactivity. Nevertheless, they were not anxious to return to the lines where their battery was entrenched, because it was necessary there to obey the command, to dig trenches, and, besides, there was always the danger from enemy fire. One of the party suffered from rheumatism. Another was having the boils on his legs treated. The one wrapped in rags had only lately contracted typhoid. The soldier with the bristly hair had a vile disease.

"Women love me," he said, slowly. "Do you think I'm lying? By God, it's the truth! Why they love me —the devil alone knows. I understand how to handle

women. The main thing is, you shouldn't try to take a woman with insolence. You've got to know how to handle them. That's so. Because not every woman respects insolence. Of course, there are some. I don't say anything against that. It doesn't always work. With a good woman you've got to be honourable. She says yes to you, and you say yes to her. She says no to you, and you say no to her. That should be understood. That's so. I once served in real service with Captain Viren. He was an independent man, was Captain Viren. There was a wench serving in his house too. She was the house-maid. She was a good, clean wench. Quite a young lady. Her manners were not at all bad. At first I thought I'd win her with insolence. Nothing came of it. Then I took to other ways. When she says yes, I say yes. When she says no, I say no. I go to this and that place with her, I go to theatre with her. I bought her chocolate too. I had my way. She going this way and that way—but it was too late. I went to see her every night. . . . Well, I grew tired of her. That's the truth. Women love me —everyone says so."

The assistant-surgeon came into the room with a thermometer.

"And you, countryman, are you again telling lying yarns about women loving you?" he asked. "Go on lying, go on! It's quite evident how women love you."

And he winked an eye.

"Sure enough, they've rewarded you."

"Ah, these women!" with feigned unconcern said the former orderly. "Be they thrice accursed! it's possible they've ruined my life."

The assistant-surgeon shook the man in the rags by the shoulder.

"Countryman, are you asleep? Wake up, won't you? It's necessary to take the temperature. How you quake! I'm afraid it'll show forty degrees at least."

"I'd like to have a drink . . ." said the ailing man quietly.

"There, stick the thermometer under your arm-pit."

The sick man obediently took the thermometer and grew silent. He felt hot and uncomfortable.

It grew dark in the cottage. The assistant-surgeon went away and returned with a cup and a tiny tin oil-lamp without a chimney. The little lamp emitted a reddish smoky flame. The assistant-surgeon placed it on the oven, and immediately the windows appeared blue and it grew bright in the room, but at the same time it became crowded and dirty.

"Do you feel badly?" asked the assistant-surgeon.

"Yes."

"I must report to the surgeon."

Within half an hour they got used to the red flicker of the little lamp, and it grew tedious again. The soldier who had rheumatism began to scratch. Insects were biting him.

"The devil take them! The cursed things are biting again. I don't like the Minsk province for that, there's no hut without them."

He restlessly rose to his knees, drew from his pocket a small greasy box and, lighting a match, began to draw the flame along the wall.

"Are you burning them again?" asked the soldier with the boils.

"Yes, I'm burning the anathemas. They've made life miserable for me."

"Only see that you don't burn the hut down!"

"Never fear!"

A long silence followed.

"That's all there's to it—the women love me," said the orderly. "Why they love me—it's more than I can say. Not one's been able to stand up against me. By God, it's true. Only last year I was on leave, and I couldn't keep the women off. Soldiers' wives. You wouldn't believe it of them!"

"Yes, that's true as to soldiers' wives," said the man who was burning the insects. "You wouldn't believe it of them! Yet everyone knows it. The husbands aren't at home."

"What have they to be afraid of?" said the man with the boils angrily. "The husband is in the trenches. Far away. It's hard to live without a man! Ekh! Our life is like serving a sentence of hard labour. Only if I ever found out that my little wife was tricking me, I'd kill her. By God, I'd kill her!"

"Good. All the same you wouldn't do it!" said the orderly. "As I was saying, I arrived there during my leave. Everybody taking off their hat to you! Well, I had a jolly good time. I couldn't pass by for the women. Only I don't want such women. What I want is that a woman should be young and spruce-like. And in our village, where I was stopping, the third hut from the end, there was living a woman, a good sort. A soldier's wife. She was called Dasha. That means, Darya. A proper sort of woman. Good. I am for her. There's nothing at first. She holds her own, and won't hear anything. I tried insolence—nothing in that. I tried the honour game—nothing in that either. A hard nut to crack, thought I. And an artilleryman to boot! I approach her this way and that—she won't give in. I take a stroll with her every blessed day—she won't give in. I say to her: I'll come to you tonight. She sits

there all white like that oven there. If she'd only smile —but nothing. I see people laughing at me. But no! Just think of it, she came to me herself, of her own good will. 'I can't,' says she, 'stand it any longer without my husband.' And she breaks out crying because it's two years since she's seen her husband. Of course, I kissed her gently-like, take her hands in mine, and all that. I lived with her during my whole leave as with a wife: I come to see her in the evening, and she takes off my boots for me, and trembles all over. It was wonderful! She followed me wherever I went, like a shadow. Such a quiet one she was. A fine woman. And the main thing, if another young fellow went up to her—she wouldn't have anything to do with him. But against me she wouldn't stand up. Women love me, and it's a fact!"

"And what province do you come from?" asked the soldier with the boils suspiciously.

"The Kherson, the Ananyevsky district. We're not fellow-countrymen by any chance?"

"No. I'm from Tavrichesk."

"Yes. She was a fine woman, was Dasha. In a word, tea with cream. Just to think of her, is enough to——"

A sufficiently long silence followed.

"What village do you come from?" suddenly asked the man wrapped in rags, in a weak voice.

They all turned to him. From the dark corner gleamed a single attentive eye.

"I'm from Nikolaevka, the Ananyevsky district. Countryman, by any chance?"

"Yes, we're countrymen," replied the man in rags. "I too am from Nikolaevka."

"Ah!" The orderly grew animated. "That means, you know Dasha, the soldier's wife?"

"I know her," uttered the weak voice. "She's my wife. My wife. So we're fellow-countrymen."

It became so quiet that the dim booming of a gun in the lines, eight versts away, was clearly audible. The soldier with the boils coughed.

"If only I could have a drink . . ." said the man wrapped in rags.

He felt frozen again. He was cold and uncomfortable. He wished he might neither see nor hear anything, nor feel the fever that burned at his eyes and temples. It seemed to him there was no war, and no stranger's hut, and no bristly soldier—he was in his fancy in his own hut—and all this appeared to be only a horrible nightmare.

GLIEB ALEKSEEV

Glieb Alekseev writes: "War and Revolution have given me birth for art as they have given birth to many of my literary contemporaries; our biography dates from these events. I was born in 1892, my parents prepared me for the peaceful life of a jurist, they taught me to love the country quiet and the long Russian twilights, in which the days stretched like centuries, and the centuries were as days. But fifteen years ago, with a worn little bag in my hand, I left home for the front, and from that day I have not yet returned and, perhaps, never shall return to the quiet shelters of my childhood and youth." He saw war in Galicia, in Roumania, "rotted in the trenches" before Czernovitz, took part in many attacks on the Austrians; wounded, tossed about in carts along country roads, and lay in hospital beds; and in the end faced typhus, cholera and hunger. . . . Later he was an aviator. . . . Ultimately, during the chaos of revolution, he escaped on an English steamer and landed in Piraeus, where he began the life of a wanderer, "who had neither a country, nor a family, nor a language, nor even a change of clothing." Afterwards, he became a sailor and visited many ports. A meeting with Maxim Gorky and Boris Pilniak in 1923 in Berlin decided his fate; he returned to Moscow and threw in his lot with the revolution and continued the literary career which he had begun only the year before with the publication in Berlin of a volume of Russian tales.

# OTHER EYES

*By* Glieb Alekseev

## 1.

In the wood, at dawn, Evsey had been crushed by a tree. Awakened by the clinging mist which had eaten into his eyes, Evsey thrust from his breast the heavy trunk, which was rough and smelt warmly of resin, for it was spring. He dragged himself, finally, towards the branches; sidewise, by digging into the ground with his heels,—in constant fear of disturbing his crushed breast—he managed at last to extricate himself from his sheep-skin coat, which remained under the tree, and for a long time afterward, with weakened hands, he pulled at the garment from under the sticky fir.

His breast did not smart from its wounds. Evsey was not conscious that on his arms and neck, where the shirt collar had stiffly cut into the flesh, the blood had congealed in the cool of the April morning. He found it extraordinarily hard to breathe; it was as if a boot were crushing him and he hadn't sufficient strength to throw off the painful weight. Then, awkwardly and cautiously supporting his breast, he raised his eyes.

That which he saw in the tardy spring sunrise was strange and new. The solemn, silent tops of the firs were bathed in the blood of the sunrise; cross-bills were leaping on the branches, shaking down the cones; the cones fell to the ground with a dull sound; the

sound caused the birds to rise in impetuous flight and to perch on the neighbouring alder-tree, where they need not fear any human being. The as yet timid, rolled leaves of the alder-tree on this windless morning, delicately trembled in the sun, as leaves tremble before a storm or at the birth of such a morning as this. Below, beneath the trunks, there were still remnants of snow in the hollows, and the dead leaves of the past year visible under the snow emanated a putrescent warmth; while here and there, from the soil, with a startling persistence, some flower put forth its dirtyish yellow beads. It was strange! He had been here tens of times since a few days before he had conceived the idea of repairing his barn and had come here to steal the necessary lumber; hundreds of times in his long life he had met dawn in the woods; yet he had never observed the outpouring of sun on the trunks of the firs, nor the spring-like red buds of the birches, nor the cross-bills in the sunrise playing with cones.

Having observed this for the first time, Evsey, who had never before observed these things, became frightened and began to cough. His mouth was filled with something salty and sticky from the cough. Evsey held his breath, drawing up the saliva from his chest, and he was not astonished when, spitting, he saw blood.

"Whew, oh Lord!" muttered Evsey aloud. "What does it mean?"

It was fast growing lighter in the wood. The dense grey clouds, which floated in the heights, became first rosy, then red. In the empty blue spaces between clouds the stars, one after the other, became extinguished, as if it were melted away. The wind arose beyond the outskirts and touched the lofty tree-tops which rocked

with a dull moan; it was then that the crushed heart felt relief, and the blood stopped beating at the temples with a blacksmith's hammer. Then—in the revealed silence—Evsey heard a prolonged screech. He smiled, as he realized it was the screech-owl, grown blind with the coming of dawn.

"What does it mean?" Evsey asked himself again, in perplexity. Only yesterday he had been in the wood: —a wood is a wood—a wealth of fine trees for barns and huts, to say nothing of firewood! But now the wood was alive. . . . Or was it that the soul had opened the eyes to something not observed before?

"It's time to go home!" thought Evsey, much distraught. Embracing the trunk which had crushed him, he rose to his feet and slowly walked away:—from tree to tree, supporting himself by the twigs, until he reached the outskirts of the wood—there, among the bushes, he had left his mare tied up since the evening before. It was hard to walk. It seemed as if his feet were not stepping on the ground but on his chest, but Evsey did not sigh even once but only the more tightly clenched his teeth, and lifted his face to the sky, a face intensely clear as the sky itself. In the bushes the mare, after its long waiting, greeted her master with an impatient neighing, but Evsey did not chirrup to his horse as he had done yesterday, when he had borne away some stolen trees; he merely untied the halter and, without a glance, fell on his side into the sled. . . .

2.

When he approached his home, Evsey espied his wife behind the hedge. She was planting onions in the garden. In the gutters, between the vegetable beds,

there were white strips of ice, touched by the morning frost; a basket stood upside down on one of the beds, beside it lay his wife's short fur cloak and a rake. The old woman, in a warm kerchief tied round her head to her very eyes and a mere blouse, was, with measured movements, bending towards the earth, and sticking the onions, as though they were nipples, into the soft black turf.

"Matvevna!" Evsey called faintly.

Raising her head from the ground, she turned across her shoulder and, seeing Evsey's horse, said in a calm voice, as if continuing an interrupted conversation:

"It isn't locked . . . lift the bar. . . ."

"Matvevna!" Evsey called louder, and there was guilt in his voice. "Come here, Matvevna! . . ."

"What more do you want?" the woman growled with habitual rudeness, as she rose from her task. She went to the hedge, wiping her hands on her apron as she approached. Without a glance she raised the bar, and pulled back the gate. The horse, without urging, entered the yard; the sled brushed against the stumps of wood along the side and against the old woman's feet. It was only then that the old woman, seeing that Evsey made no effort to get out of the sled, asked:

"Are you frozen?"

"The log . . ." said Evsey in a low voice, as if ashamed. "The log's fallen on my breast. . . ."

"Bruised you, has it?" asked the old woman, in business-like fashion.

"Bruised me, that's it!" Evsey flung at her, glad that she had guessed.

"I'll unharness the mare," she said, taking hold of the shaft. "You go into the cottage. . . ."

While Evsey, afraid to breathe, was lifting one foot

after the other, and then climbed up the few steps and in doing so had caught hold of the wash-basin and let it fall, the old woman dully surveyed his sheep-skin coat all stuck over on the back with pine-needles and reflected that the coat had been scorched during the winter while her husband was lying on the stove. She unharnessed the horse, dragged the sled into the barn, glanced into the water barrel—there was no water there, so she picked up the shoulder shaft with two pails and went to the well, swinging from side to side as women always do when carrying the shaft with the pails across their shoulders. Two young women stood by the well—near them were some pails full of water. The young women, holding their sides with laughter, were telling one another dreams, which they had dreamed during a brief spring night, and were just picking up their pails when the old woman appeared at the well.

"And my man," the old woman exclaimed, even before she reached the well, "my man's been crushed by a tree! Yes, it's true!"

"By a tree-e?" incredulously sang out the younger of the two women. "How'd he come to do it?"

Afraid lest they go before they had heard her, the old woman quickly told them how the evening before Evsey had driven into the wood for logs, how she had advised him to take a rope with him, and how today he arrived on his horse—he was sure to die, there wasn't the tiniest drop of blood in his face. In her perturbation she waved her arms; she was eager to describe in detail the sort of face Evsey had when he arrived home, but she remembered that she actually hadn't looked at Evsey's face. After they had heard the main facts the young women lifted their pails and walked along

the road, swinging their hips. When they turned the corner, Matvevna heard how the younger of the two women shouted the news about Evsey being crushed by a fir. Then Matvevna made haste to return home. Back in her yard, she gave the horse drink and some hay—the horse snatched a mouthful of hay from the feed-bag and let it drop.

"So you're at your pranks!" she shouted, picking up the hay and putting it back into the feed-bag. Then she walked into the vegetable garden, and, looking into the basket, found ten onions left there. The old woman surveyed the vegetable bed with a worried expression, and bent over to plant the remaining onions. Then she smoothed the ground with a rake, as if she were combing it, and this done, she went into the hut. . . .

3.

Evsey was lying on a bench in his sheep-skin coat and felt boots. A pool of water had formed on the floor from the snow which had thawed from his heels—that was the first thing noticed by the old woman. She flung her short fur cloak on the bench, at Evsey's feet, and paused in the middle of the hut, then, as before, without looking at his face, she asked:

"Shall I get the samovar ready? And will you have some cabbage-soup?"

Evsey did not reply. From under the arm which covered his face, he could see the hem of the old woman's skirt, bespattered with spring mud; from the hearth the cat squinted at him; there were cups on the table, and a round loaf of bread only lately taken from the oven and still steaming. A huge clock of walnut, which had been Evsey's share of the spoils when

the landowner's estate had been divided up among the peasants, ticked from the wall loudly and accurately. Because the domestic hearth was warm, because every thing was in its customary place, it seemed to him that nothing had happened in the wood; he would presently rise, attend to his horse, at mid-day he would receive his brother-in-law who had promised to come; he would also take the manure to the fields. Propping up his arm on the bench, Evsey tried to rise. But his eyes grew dim, his arm would not support him, and he again lay down. With a guilty smile he glanced into the watchful eyes of his wife and made a helpless gesture.

"Masha!" he faintly called.

The old woman did not reply, but gazed intently at Evsey's beard, at that spot where the shirt had stiffly cut into the neck.

"Masha!" Evsey called louder, slightly raising himself from the bench.

"Who d'you want?" she asked, suddenly grown perturbed. Her eyes became dark and malignant.

"You, Matvevna!" whispered Evsey, with effort.

And because he had called her Masha, as he used to call her when she was a girl, and as he had not called her afterwards during their married life together, the old woman understood:—Evsey was to rise no more, death had come. . . .

## 4.

Towards morning of the following day Evsey returned to consciousness. Through the window an expanse of blue sky was visible, someone's footsteps crunched on the frozen ground, the crows bustled about in the garden, breaking twigs and building nests. Be-

hind the wall there was audible the sound of milk falling into the pail and the voice of the old woman talking to the cow:

"Why d'you go on like this, you fool. . . . Don't you know any better? . . ."

On hearing her hoarse voice, Evsey smiled: every morning, on waking, he was used to hearing his wife discuss with the beast in that way. Before this he had not even observed what a working creature his Matvevna was. If she would only come in now with the pail of milk, he would assuredly tell her something tender, from which his own heart would feel touched. But the words hummed in his breast, like bees in a hive during the spring, and did not come out. . . .

Because of the sun, because of the silence of the morning, because of the sad consciousness that on such a day, avid as he was for labour, he was lying—as during a great holy day—on the bench there in the newly cleaned hut (he realized that the old woman had cleaned the place out of respect for his illness)—Evsey felt with his whole being that the time had come when something had to be remembered and something to be decided upon.

"Must mean I'm going to die!" he thought submissively, and out of pity for himself he began to cry. With that avidity with which a dying man tries to bear away in his consciousness everything which surrounds him, Evsey surveyed the room. Around him was everything by which and for which he had lived. There was a rosy hue on the cleaned earthen pots. The cat, stretching its paws black with soot, was asleep on the hearth. A black-beetle, with agitated feelers, was crawling down the grey curtain. The clock on the wall ticked with measured accuracy. A calendar with a

portrait of Kalinin * hung under the clock—the date remained as yesterday:—Evsey himself had always torn off the leaf towards evening, when the lamp was lighted.

He remembered how as a boy he ran, without drawers, in a long shirt, from the darkening fields to the place where a watch was being kept on the horses in the night. Bonfires had already been lighted on the river's banks; the horses, huge and black, loomed like mountains in the dark. He was looking for his brother, in order to tell him his father was dying and to ask him to hurry into the hut—his mother had sent him, Evsey, that he might guard the horses. "What is it?" asked the voice of his brother, strange and malignant in the darkness. But now the most astonishing thing that remained to him of this memory was not that he had seen the large stern-looking feet of his father, who was lying on the table, but the little gully beyond the river, past which he ran for his brother. A mist filled the gully, and its white hanging tufts were as the hair of his dead father.

Then he remembered how during an April night he had stood by a hedge with Masha, holding her slender fingers, and, ashamed to look into her eyes, whispered something very tender, but what?—all his life he could not remember what he had said. She fended herself against him with her hands, and called him the devil, which caused Evsey's heart to fall into his knees. Then the thawed road grew dark, and black as Masha's eyes shone the meadows on both sides. He strained his memory. Evsey wanted to remember what sort of face Matvevna had then, when she was young; but he could

* A well-known Bolshevik leader.

recall only her kerchief. She always used to wear this kerchief to church, but as soon as she married she put it away in the trunk as a marriage-portion for Paranka.

He remembered another day. That was much later, when he was already aging. It was the day in which the peasants divided up the estate of the landlord, Andrey Pavlovitch. The peasants stood in a row in Andrey Pavlovitch's study, in their sheep-skin coats, and were unapprehensive of the circumstance that they had come in wet felt boots. Evsey gazed over someone's shoulder at Andrey Pavlovitch's trembling hands which rested on the table while their owner dared not raise his eyes, fully aware as he was of the object of their visit; he only waited for them to speak. The ticking of the clock was audible from the dining room, while outdoors the cold wind whistled among the snow drifts. Someone in the dining-room had dropped a teaspoon, and its pitiful tinkle, like a shot, broke the stifling silence; and the peasants, as if acting at a signal, moved nearer the table. In the morning the big farm-house was burning. Evsey awoke behind the barns, with a silver platter in his hands. In the shabby November morning the platter shone with a single sun-gleam. And the whole day long—in the evening he picked cabbages in his garden—he wanted to sing and laugh without cause.

"We've had a nice little holiday!" he had said that morning to his wife when he entered the hut. "D'you hear?"

Matvevna was kneading dough for bread.

"What did you get?" she asked indifferently, scraping the sticky dough from her hands.

"Everything!" said Evsey, gesticulating with joy.

"Not so fast, not so fast!" the old woman inter-

rupted him. "What did you do that they gave you everything?"

As he now recalled these words, Evsey lapsed into thought. What actually had he done? Only these three happenings persisted in his memory: his father's death, his marriage, and the destruction of the landlord's farmhouse. The days passed by monotonously, with a measured gait, no differently than the way of a mare in the field. . . .

"Sixty years lived like this—that means, without a thought!" said Evsey, with some effort, aloud; but having said this he became frightened:—for the first time in his life he became conscious of time, all the days gathered in a ball in his memory.

"They will say up there: 'What sort of thing have you done, that you should get everything?' . . . What have I done? I've squandered my life—that's what I've done!"

And Evsey clearly saw what an incredibly long life he had had. If one should put together the days in which he had mowed, such days alone would make a whole month each year. He went to mow in the early morning while the soil was still soft with dew and the sun was still trying to give warmth to the east. "As soon as there's a bit of light, I'll wake you," the old woman used to say to him in the days in which he had to mow. She gave him a bundle containing bread and an onion. Evsey walked beyond the gullies, in the same meadow where he had once run for his brother and, as he walked, he thought: Would the grass be soft today, and would it fall easily under the scythe? The meadow began at the pillar which had at that time still separated the lands of the proprietor from those of the peasants. At this pillar Evsey sharpened his scythe, and he placed

the whet-stone on top of the pillar. While he sharpened the scythe, Evsey each time, with an unchangeable and avid love, surveyed the meadow, which he presently would traverse with a swinging scythe. "Did the birds sing then as they sang yesterday in the wood?" he thought, trembling, because he had not then observed the birds.

He walked home at sunset, his coat thrown over his perspiring shoulders, his shoes wet from the grass, his back and shoulders lame—as if from a draught. The old woman silently placed a bowl of cabbage-soup and a jug of milk on the table. Without haste, with that deliberate respect with which he worked, Evsey pushed away the bowl and began to roll a cigarette. This was just before sleep, when the old woman cleared the table, while he sat, thinking he had done so much that day which he must not forget to repeat tomorrow, and he must tell the old woman anything remarkable that happened during the day.

"Andrey Pavlovitch has begun to mow," Evsey would say, hiccoughing. "Last year he began after Peter and Paul's, but this year—whew!—he's in a hurry. . . ."

The old woman, cleared the table in expectant silence. Evsey indifferently glanced at her kerchief and at her soiled boots.

"The Miatlevskys have gone to work—they get a rouble-forty a day. . . ."

He realized that she did not reply out of propriety; now, when he was sharing with her the news of the day, it was her business—the business of a woman—to listen.

Then, as was becoming to a good manager, who

knew not only what was happening in the field and the village, he observed:

"Because of the mowing we haven't had time to cover up the cabbages . . . tomorrow you'll cover them up, and I'll return a little earlier and plant the seedlings. . . ."

As they were talking of domestic affairs, the old woman ventured in her turn:

"Mitrevna has some good seedlings—said she got them from the farm-house. . . ."

Thus the day ended. Evsey, stretching his limbs, slowly rose. First he went to look to his horse and see that he was settled for the night; when he had been younger he used to return to his woman; now he slept in the barn, cuddled up in the hay, covered up to his eyes with his sheep-skin coat; he remained thus until morning, without thoughts or dreams.

What had he said that was remarkable, except about the mowing and the seedlings? And with this reflection Evsey uneasily turned on his bench.

And what would he have done now if only his crushed breast were healed? "I've torn down the wash-basin!" he suddenly remembered—he ought to have it fixed against the wall. There were other things he had forgotten to do, which he must do. . . .

Another thought came to him:—he ought to walk up to the old woman, and smoothe her cheek with his rough hand, and look into her eyes and see what colour they were.

The door into the hut opened and, wiping her feet on the threshold, the old woman walked in. She placed the pail on the bench and walked up to him. It was as if his perturbation had passed over to her.

"Evsey!" she called in a broken voice.

Evsey looked straight into her face, without blinking and without the strength to open his mouth. Dark, dark as the spring meadows, Masha's eyes looked into his revealed soul.

"Evsey!" repeated the old woman in a painful whisper. "An' did you forget the axe in the wood?"

5.

Towards evening Evsey had grown mute. The nearness of death was visible in his face with its manifold tokens: his temples had fallen in, his ears had become transparent like the sheets of glazed paper in the window, and on Evsey's grey lips there lay a quiet wasted smile. With a gesture he called his wife. He wanted to say to her:

"I want a drink!"

And it came out:—*won-na-iki.* . . . Sweat broke out on his face, his body was in a fever. His legs beat against the bench like sticks. Evsey had never had such an experience with his legs. It grew dark in the hut, the darkness fell from the ceiling, and indifferently settled in vague shadows in the corners.

"When I die, everything will be dark!" thought Evsey wearily.

Someone's fingers, with assurance, tapped on the window. The old woman, as if ashamed, quickly left the bench. The son-in-law entered and breathed cool air into Evsey's very eyes.

"Well, how are you, father?" he asked, sighing out of propriety.

"*Won-na-iki* . . ." guiltily smiled Evsey. He had wanted to say: "You see, I'm dying!"

Because he had spoken so incoherently, and also because his son-in-law was dressed in a new sheep-skin coat, Evsey felt himself to be a small ill-omened old man; it was as if the workers had gone out into the field and he, because of his old age, had been left to look after the chickens, and the chickens had been carried away by the crows. At the thought, Evsey stretched forward in the direction of the window and, with his hand, pointed toward the tops of the bare trees along the hedge where in the course of the day the crows had built their nests.

"He'll die!" said the son-in-law, going away from the bench. "Have you called the priest?"

"No," replied the old woman. "It's eight versts to the priest. . . . And I've been putting things for his fever . . . Mitrevna has advised. As for him, he's already getting blue round his forehead. . . ."

"Shall I say something to Paranka?" asked her son-in-law irresolutely. "You know how it is . . . she's getting ready to give birth . . . she's sure to bear her little one by night. . . ."

"So her time's come?" asked the old woman.

"Yes, it's come. . . . Tomorrow she'll be fit to take the manure out. . . ."

"Yes, yes, the manure's got to be taken out," agreed the old woman.

They both understood very well that it was necessary to talk of other things now, but they could not make up their minds. Then, her son-in-law realizing that she would not be the one to begin, sat down at Evsey's feet and said:

"If you're worryin' about the coffin, I'll put one together at once. . . . It's a matter of time, as you know. . . ."

As he listened to the conversation, Evsey cunningly screwed up his eyes. He even wanted to smile, but his lips wouldn't join, and there was no smile but only a hole. . . . "Well, well, if he isn't in a hurry!" he thought, his lips barely stirring.

The old woman and her son-in-law went out of the hut. Evsey heard his son-in-law rummaging about in his small room, a room which he never allowed anyone to enter, not even the old woman. The room contained Evsey's most precious things:—a saw, an axe, two scythes, nails which he had been collecting all his life, big screws belonging to some machine broken on the landlord's estate, a damaged railway lamp, screw-nuts, worn-out horse-shoes, and on the wall—a new horse-collar. The old man felt humiliated because his son-in-law went into the little room without asking permission; it was clear that they had ceased to count him as the master. Their voices babbled on dully, then his wife's voice, which he heard last, died away into silence. Then he heard the steady chipping sound of the axe on wood.

"He's getting ready the wood for the coffin!" thought Evsey. Now, that his son-in-law had actually begun to build a coffin, his last hope of rising was gone. "I ought to have a priest!" thought Evsey, but immediately remembered that it was a drive of eight versts to the priest, and who was there to go for him apart from himself?—and he grew calm again. It was quiet in the hut, the evening shadows were fast settling in the corners, like birds. A herd of cattle was being driven in the road, the resounding voices of the women mingled with the mooing of the cows, not yet accustomed to the yards they had abandoned during the winter. The laughter of girls, conscious of spring,

sounded just near the window. Evsey sighed deeply and with relief—now he felt that life outdoors which, without weakening, went on, breathing in upon him the forces of spring; now he felt death, which looked into his eyes and freed him from all that was earthly.

The old woman, bearing on her shoulders the shaft with two pails, came into the hut. With condescending curiosity, Evsey watched her every movement, aware that presently she would prepare the water for washing him. Now she was dragging clothes boilers into the room and filling them with water. She chased the cat from the hearth, shouting at him: "Get out! Get out! You haven't the fever, have you, you accursed one?" Then she worked the bellows on the flame, and, lifting the boilers, put them on the hearth.

When the fire flamed and its reflections began to dance in the corners, the old woman pushed the boilers into the oven, and sat down on a stool. She sat there like one frozen, and supported her head on her elbows. And she remained sitting thus for a long time—without thoughts, darkening, as the window darkened in the night. . . .

## 6.

Evsey died at dawn. He was delirious before death, then suddenly—as if someone had nudged him—he became conscious and opened his eyes. The hut was aflame with the resplendent light of the rising sun. The rosy rays of the sun lay in feast-day towels on the floor, on the table and on the oven. The newly-made coffin rested on its side near the door; an axe lay on the bench, at Evsey's feet, together with some remaining nails laid out in a straight line. Two boilers were

steaming under the oven; the sun, penetrating the escaping steam, set it aflame. Everything was ready for the death journey of Evsey.

The old woman slept sitting up on the stool. Evsey guessed that she had thus passed the night; he pitifully smiled at her face warped with the years, and at the thought that her whole life she had done things she ought not to have done. . . .

"It's dawning! soon the cattle will have to be driven to the pasture!" thought Evsey and decided to wake the old woman, in order to tell her that the chief thing had come at last, of itself, without effort,—in the last minute.

"Look, Matvevna!" he wanted to say with all the sternness of his last will. "Don't forget about the pigeon-house. . . . Don't forget to hang it up . . . it's spring. . . ."

He was on the point of stretching out his hand to touch her face, which in deep slumber rested against the table, but suddenly remembered that presently a horn would sound behind the barns, that its pitiful blast would tremble in the windows: then the women, tired and malignant after sleep, would remove the creaking gate bars and drive out the cattle.

"Ah, just see how managing she's become, the old woman!" he smiled, pitying her.

And with this pitying smile he died.

MIKHAIL PRISHVIN

Mikhail Prishvin was born in 1873. In his youth, like most intellectual Russians of his day, he was implicated in revolutionary activity and served a prison sentence. He studied agriculture in Germany and specialized in it on his return to Russia. He wrote numerous essays and pamphlets on the subject. In 1905 he abandoned his agricultural activity and went north; he embodied his experience in a book called, "In the Land of Unfrightened Birds." He followed this with a book of animal stories. Since then Prishvin has written some of the best animal stories in the Russian language, notably "The Beast of Krutoyarsk" (1913), which Prince Mirsky calls a masterpiece and the finest story of its kind in Russian literature. Nature is the background of all Prishvin writes, and as human nature is quite a secondary factor in his work, it must be admitted that his stories are the most cheerful things in a literature noted for its gloom. His human beings are usually as simple as the birds and the animals he writes about; they too belong to the background of nature. The following tale is apparently an episode out of his own wanderings in the far steppes, when the author travelled under the name of Black Arab. It is, perhaps, fitting that an idyl should conclude this book, so full of the conflict of human beings in a time of war and revolution, if only to show that a Russian can be as cheerful as anybody when he writes about matters where the artifices of civilized life have not crept in.

# A WEREWOLF OF THE STEPPE

*By* MIKHAIL PRISHVIN

Ramazan, the ninth month of the lunar year, was in its last days. On a clear morning the mountains of the steppe showed, like the tall blue tents of giant nomads. The steppe wavered, the road became uneven; the pail of water, tied to the shaft of our waggon, splashed and tinkled.

"This is the backbone of the earth, the land of Arkà," said Isaac.

Happy land! Here the mutton is fat and the koumiss intoxicating,—it is the best land in the world for shepherds.

Seven tents at the foot of the mountain, as it were, seven white birds, slept, hiding their heads among their wings. By the well, laid round with stones, a girl is sitting and shearing a sheep.

"Will Janas take us in?" we ask, just as the heathen had asked Abraham in the land of Canaan.

"He'll take you in. . . ."

Here he is, a grey-haired old man, coming out of the tent with two of his sons. The old man puts his hand to his heart.

His hands are healthy. His feet are healthy. His sheep are healthy, their camels, their horses—they are all healthy, just as ours are. Thank God, amen!

His sons are lifting the tent door of felt. The father, bowing, bids us enter; a girl, with tinkling trinkets, is running to the well to shear the sheep.

Inside the shepherds' tent you feel as though you were inside of a balloon, and there is even an opening at the top which may be opened or closed.

Above may be seen a circle of blue sky; below on the ground are three black burnt stones and a log—it is the hearth. Behind the hearth, just opposite the entrance, facing the Caaba, there is a rug spread out for the guest; here also, beside the rug, feather-grass grows. Things are hanging all around.

The host himself gives water to his guest to wash his hands. His sons are holding the towels ready. One of them looks at the guest with sharp insolent eyes; the other is more noticeable for his naked yellow feet which give the impression of goodness and for his dishevelled heap of hair. The Bible comes to mind: Cain was a tiller of the soil, Abel a shepherd.

The sun still shines on the steppe: when the door of felt is lifted and some one enters, one's eyes are blinded, and afterwards for a long time there float before them violet-radiant slopes and fiery horses. One by one the kinsmen of the host enter, and one is like unto the other. One enters and sits down, cross-legged, by the hearth; another enters and sits down; and it seems as if someone were reading from a big ancient book: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob . . .

But looked at more closely, they are not all alike: one, a very robust fellow, has such a small seal-like head; another has small black mouse-like tails hanging from his upper lip; a third has the same kind of tails but, as it were, bitten short; a fourth is smaller in stature than the others, and his face is copper-red.

They all sit in a circle between the bed and the oxen-yoke, and look at the guest in silence.

For a whole month now I have wandered in the

steppe on nomadic highways, and with me has wandered my double, the Black Arab. From one end of the land to the other, Long Ear has spread tidings of his presence. He is on his way from Mecca, but whither—no one knows. Now, at last, he has strayed hither.

"Where is the Arab going?"

From all sides the watchful eyes of the steppe are fixed on the stranger. Somewhere, a white sharp tooth glistens from a half open mouth, as if ready to bite into the Arab, to see what he is made of. And here is one sitting ever so close, and looks so intently and so long until, weary, he drops back on to the pillow and snores. Another draws nearer. . . .

Enough of mirages. . . .

"I'm not an Arab!"

"Ee-oh!" exclaimed the robust fellow with the seal-like head.

"Ee-oh! Allah! He's not an Arab!" said the others.

And they all opened their mouths wide.

"Who is he then? What does he want?"

"He does not want anything," explains Isaac. "He's a scholar, he takes nothing from the steppe: neither anything hard nor anything soft, neither anything bitter nor anything salt."

"Ee-oh, Khoodai! *—Is it not the spirit of our forefathers, *aoorakh*?"

"No. He eats biscuits, drinks tea, asks about the grass, the sheep, the stars, the songs. He hunts, does his own cooking, eats like the Kirghis, with his hands; he does not pray to God. . . ."

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* Oh, Lord!

"He's a robber!" whispers the thick-set fellow with the mice-tails on his upper lip.

"He's not a robber!" Isaac says reassuringly. "Robbers are wicked people, and this scholar from Petersburg is a good man. . . ."

"Has he a soft finger on his right hand?" asks the other robust fellow with the bitten-off mice-tails on his upper lip.

The allusion is to Khidir, beggar and holy man, whose big finger on his right hand is quite boneless.

They all look at my hand, they touch the big finger: it is quite hard. The guest is not an Arab, nor an aoorakh, nor a robber, nor a holy man.

Isaac expostulates with them—for an hour—for two—the faces redden, the eyes burn, but the riddle of the Black Arab remains unsolved.

They go on chattering.

"Jock! No, it's not clear at all!"

New people, and still more new people, enter the tent, they all take up seats by the hearth, look on, ask questions, and go on chattering.

"Jock! No, it's not clear at all!"

The felt door of the tent is slightly wavering: someone outside is digging a small hole in it, and before long a narrow dark eye is to be seen gleaming through it. If you look there, the eye vanishes; when you stop looking, it reappears. The peeper had peeped his fill, and disappeared; the little hole shone with light, like a star. Now that eye was surely meeting with other like narrow dark eyes. There all the women have gathered, you can hear them whisper,—and the Arab, like a *werewolf of the steppe*, becomes transformed from the tiniest thing into the head of a pin, from a genie into

the terrible albasti.[1] Who knows? It may be, the spell of the Black Arab is working right here, among the bushes, ready to stop the kisses of loving couples; it may be, the childless wife, preparing to spend the night in the holy mountains, has had her chaste thoughts confounded?

But it all ended simply.

Someone asked:

"Has the guest a father?"

All were overjoyed at the simple question and moved nearer.

"Yes, he has a father."

"And a mother?"

"Yes. He has also a mother, and brothers, and sisters, and a grandmother, and a grandfather, just as you have in the steppes and as it is written in the holy books: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob."

"Are they all living?"

"All are living, and all are living in Peterburg."

"Ee-oh!" rejoices the old man, who resembles Abraham.

"How many houses are there in Peterburg?"

"Thousands!"

"Oh!" broke the happy cry from the open mouths.

"And are there sheep in Peterburg?" asked Abraham.

"There are, but they don't have fat tails like here in the steppe, but so!"

"How so?"

"They haven't fat tails, but tails like goats."

Like a spark, the smile flew from the lips of the

[1] A yellow-haired sterile woman, the enemy of all women desiring children, and capable of working a spell on them.

interpreter into these open mouths with white sharp teeth. The dusty folds under the broad gowns kindled, and our balloon, as it were, exploded into fragments—such is the laughter of the steppe!

The one who had fallen asleep on the pillow suddenly sprang up. Rubbing his eyes, he asks what has happened.

They answer him:

"In Peterburg the sheep don't have fat tails, but slender tails like goats."

He falls back on the pillow in convulsions, like one mown down. They all fall backward on their spines, holding their stomachs: all: the thin man with the copper-red face, the big-bellied man with the mice-tails, and the robust man who resembles him, and the man with the seal-like head, and the clever young man with the split beard, and Abraham, and even Isaac. They raise themselves, glance at their guest and again fall back, and shake their gowns with their stomachs. He who can moves nearer and caresses the good-natured man, only a little while before the mysterious, terrible Arab.

And one can hear behind the thin walls, the coins tinkle against the scythes. The loving couples in the bushes are no longer afraid. No longer do thoughts confound the childless wives ready for a journey among the holy mountains. He is not terrible, this Black Arab, and it is as if he had lived here always, thousands and thousands of years.